THE INDIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITION

PAUL YOUNGER

BHARATIYA VIDYA PRAKASHAN
VARANASI-1 (India)

PREFACE

When I first came to India, some thirteen years ago, I was amazed at the strength of the stream of continuity which held ancient India and modern India together. Nothing I had read about either the ancient period or the modern period had adequately conveved to me this sense of continuity. Looking first for the spirit underlying this continuity I spent a number of years studying the idea of *duḥkha* or suffering, which it seemed to me had played a major role in helping ancient India formulate a unified world view.[1] This study in turn led me to ask how ideas like *duḥkha* were used later in the tradition, and, finally. how the tradition, developed in relative isolation, was able to survive the major encounters with Western religion which began with the coming of Islam in the Tenth Century.

To discuss the whole of the Indian Religious Tradition in the course of one small book is indeed an ambitious task. It should be clear to the reader from the beginning that what is presented here is not a complete history of the tradition with all the details included. It is rather an anthropological analysis of the nature of "tradition" as it developed in India. What was the basis for this stream of continuity, and what was the course of its development ?

I use the phrase "religious tradition" in a very special sense to mean "a conscious authoritative expression of religious experience." The range of phenomena to which we commonly ascribe the adjective "religious" might usefully be distinguished into a number of concentric circles moving out from a center, which is the mysterious experi-

1 *The Birth of the Indian Religious Tradition : Studies in the Indian Concept of Duḥkha (Suffering)*, Ph. D Dissertation, Princeton University, 1965 ; "The Concept of *Duḥkha* and the Indian Religious Tradition," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. XXXVII, 2, 1969.

ence itself. Nearest to the center are the actions (ritual) and words (myth) which are spontaneous expressions of the mysterious experience. A little further removed from the experience is the authoritative summary of ritual and myth which provides a basis for continuity and is here called "tradition." Even further removed from the original experience are the cultural forms of art, philosophy and society. The concern of this book is to illustrate the character of the ring of "tradition" and to see how it develped in India.

The development pattern in the religious tradition of India seems to be a pattern that is found elsewhere as well. The character of the *Background Period* was "mythological" in the sense that the various mythical explanations of reality had not yet been sorted out or differentiated. The period of *Formulation* was "prophetic" in that a somewhat exclusive religious message was set forth by great creative figures. The period of *Consolidation* was "dogmatic" in the sense that there was a looking back to the central dogmas that had been established even as there was also a broadening of the base to include the whole social order and a reaching out to express the dogma in terms of philosophy and art. Finally, in the period of *Survival,* when the tradition is under attack, the religious spirit is called "critical" in the sense that it is forced to question and modify its character but at the same time is able to develop new depths in the areas investigated.

I trust that those who are not familiar with this approach to the study of religion or who feel that they disagree with one or another of my interpretations will read far enough to understand the general character of my approach. No doubt this interpretation of the range of the Indian Religious Tradition and of its pattern of development will be modified by subsequent scholars. Such modification is both inevitable and welcome for the territory is at present largely uncharted and the best paths are not always obvious. It is time that the stream of continuity which has been preserved

in India for centuries through the oral tradition be interpreted by modern scholars, but such scholars of necessity begin with the awareness that they are talking of something the depths and breadths of which are mysterious and quite often hard to define.

I am indebted to all of India for the years of reflection which underlie this study. I learned a lot from my teachers at Banaras Hindu University, and even more from the Harijans of Chittupur with whom I lived. But I owe the most to my wife in the depths of whose life the stream of the Indian tradition is continually reflected for me. The interpretations I present are very much my own, but I hope they can be seen as a part of the living tradition of India, of which I would only be too glad to be considered a part.

McMaster University **Paul Younger**
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

DATE LIST

B. C.	c.	3000— 600	'Background Period'
	c.	3000—1500	Indus Civilization
	c.	3000—1000	Ṛg Vedic Civilization
	c.	1000— 600	Later Vedic literature
	c.	600— 322	'Period of Formulation'
	c.	700— 300	Principal Upanisads
	c.	483	Death of the Buddha
	c.	322—1000	A. D. 'Period of Consolidation'
	c.	322— 185	Mauryan Dynasty (Chandragupta, Aśoka, possibly Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*)
	c.	185— 71	Śunga Dynasty (possibly Manu's Dharmaśāstra)
A. D.	c.	78— 250	Kuṣāṇa Dynasty (Nāgārjuna, Gāndhāra Buddha)
	c.	100	Possible date for *Bhagavad Gītā*
	c.	320— 540	Gupta Dynasty (Sārnāth Buddha and Sectarian Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism)
	c.	760—1142	Pāla (Buddhist) Dynasty in Bengal
	c.	788— 820	Śaṅkara
	c.	907—1310	Chōla Dynasty (Southern Temples and Bronze Dancing Śiva)
	c.	900—1100	Khujarāho Temples
	c.	1000—present	'Period of Survival'
	c.	1192—1526	Delhi Sultanate
	c.	1526—1757	Mughal Dynasty
	c.	1000	Possible date of *Bhagavata Purāṇa*
	c.	1137	Death of Rāmānuja
	c.	1278	Death of Mādhva

c. 1479	**Death of Vallabha**
c. 1533	**Death of Chaitanya**
c. 1623	**Death of Tulsī Dāss**
c. 1757—1947	**British Rule**
1772—1833	Rām Mohan Roy
1817—1905	Debendranāth Tagore
1824—1883	Swāmī Dayānanda
1843—1884	Keshub Chandra Sen
1856—1920	Bāl Gangādhar Tilak
1861—1941	Rabīndranāth Tagore
1862—1902	Swāmī Vivekānanda
1869—1948	Mohandās K. Gāndhi
1872—1950	Aurobindo Ghosh
1888—	Sarvepalli Rādhākrishnan
1889—1964	Jawaharlāl Nehru
1895—	Vinobhā Bhāve
1904—1966	Lāl Bahādur Śāstri

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PART I

BACKGROUND OF THE TRADITION

INTRODUCTION

There were two separate civilizations in the Indian subcontinent which antedated the present Indian Religious Tradition.[1] There are links which connect each of these civilizations with the later Tradition, but these links are more or less limited to one area of life in each case. In the case of the civilization which the archaeologists have named the "Indus Valley Civilization" the link is that of popular religious ritual.[2] In the case of the civilization which the later Tradition named the "Ṛg Vedic Civilization" the link is that of language and literature. Because there were links these two civilizations have made significant contributions to Indian religion. However, since for the purpose of this study "tradition" is defined as "a conscious authoritative selection of religious experience," these civilizations cannot properly be spoken of as parts of the Indian Religious Tradition. Nevertheless, as evidence of the rich variety of mythic understanding upon which the Indian Tradition drew, and of the dual parentage which is so important in understanding much of the later Tradition, this period is an invaluable aid in the interpretation of that which is to come.

1. The decision to see these two civilizations as separate from the Indian Religious Tradition was the most difficult one in this whole interpretation. It is the only possible interpretation consistent with my definition of "religious tradition," and, I think, goes a long way to solving some of the very involved problems that arose from trying to associate these three essentially different religious outlooks with one another. In particular I hope this interpretation will not offend the Indians who have recently gone to great pains to refute the Western interpretation of Ṛg Vedic ideas as very different from those found in the later Tradition, C. Kunhan Raja, *Poet-Philosophers of the Ṛg Veda*, (Madras : Ganesh and Company, 1963). I trust that such Indians will read far enough to see that my interpretation of the *Ṛg Veda* is very like theirs.
2. The term "ritual" is used in the very broad sense appropriate to India of any patterned ceremonial activity.

CHAPTER ONE

INDUS CIVILIZATION

The Indus Civilization is one of that family of civilizations known to have flourished in the river basins of the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, and elsewhere from sometime in the Third or Fourth Millenium B. C. Like the others, the Indus Civilization was centered in well-planned cities and depended on an agricultural economy.[1] The city planners in the Indus cities of Harappā and Mohenjo-daro were concerned with sanitation, and an elaborate sewage system and ritual bath are prominent features of their architecture. The buildings are arranged in a very orderly fashion with an elite community set off in a separate citadel area (Plate I). There do not appear to be any temples in this generally pragmatic arrangement.

The script of the Indus Civilization has not yet been deciphered, and the ideas of that civilization can only be surmised by reconstructing a socio-political structure that could have accounted for this architectural development and by analyzing the spirit of the extensive art work that has been found. It has generally been felt that the simplicity

1. The best general account of these archaeological discoveries is in Sir R. E Mortimer Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*, Supplement to *C. H. I*, (Cambridge, England, 1953) The records of the original excavations are contained in Sir John Marshall and others, *Mohenjo Daro and the Indus Civilization*, 3 vols., (London, 1931). Later excavations were made by Mackay, Vats, Wheeler and others, Excavations are still being conducted both at these sites and elsewhere and reinterpretations of the extent, the nature and the cause of the downfall of this civilization are constantly being suggested. A summary of the later work up to 1962 is contained in H. D. Sankalia, *Indian Archaeology Today*, (Bombay : Asia, 1962). An Indian account of this period and most periods of the Tradition can be found in the now almost complete series entitled *History and Culture of the Indian People* edited by R. C. Mazumdar and published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, (Bombay).

and regularity of the construction, the heirarchical arrangement of the housing in rows of graduated sizes, the separation of the citadel area, and the massive defensive walls all point to an ordered authoritarian society.

A further insight into the nature of this ordered authoritarian society can be gained if the bust of the bearded man (Plate 2) is, as is generally thought, that of a priest-king.[1] The bearing of the figure and the trifoil decoration of the garment make it appear that the figure is a ruler, and the yogic concentration of the eyes gives him an ascetic character appropriate to a religious man. If he is a priest-king and a member of the ruling class in this society, then we have a fairly complete picture of an authoritarian society governed by an ascetic elite. This would be consistent with the general pattern of river valley societies in which authoritarian regimes ordered all of life and people became warriors only in defence of their society.

The numerous simple clay figurines (Plate 3) found in these archaeological sites indicate that the common people of this civilization worshipped the Mother Goddess.[2] These small figurines have exaggerated breasts and hips and are usually pregnant. This interest in fertility, so appropriate in an agricultural society, is also seen in the ritual stones representing the male and female sexual organs and probably also in the numerous clay figures of bulls.

A more refined level of art is represented in the carefully constructed clay seals that have been found (Plate 4). These seals contain mythic representations that can only partly be understood. Some contain animal figures with the bull again prominent. Some with female figures and trees seem to be making the common association of fertility and tree spirits. One of the most interesting contains an ascetic figure with a strange hornlike headdress and animals gathered

1. Any standard history of Indian art discusses these works of art, but a particularly interpretative account is found in Stella Kramisch, *The Art of India Through the Ages*, (London and New York, 1954).

2. E. O. James, *Mother Goddess*, (London, 1959).
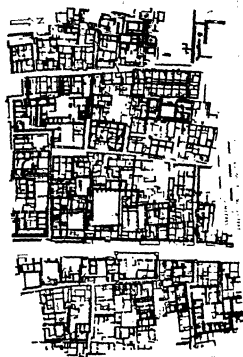
PLATE 1 : Mohenjo-daro Town Plan

PLATE 2 · Bearded Man of Indus Civilization

PLATE 3 · Clay Mother Goddess from Indus Civilization

PLATE 4 · Controversial Clay Seal from Indus Civilization

PLATE 5 : Male Torso in Stone from Indus Civilization

PLATE 6 Dancing Male Torso in Stone from Indus Civilization

around him. It has been suggested that this is an early form of Śiva as Paśupati the Lord of the animals.[1] While this identification is not certain, Śiva's later association with the *linga* and with fertility themes generally make it possible to understand him in the context of the fertility concerns of this Civilization.

The larger pieces of sculpture have no iconographic indications and must be interpreted solely in terms of the spirit they convey. The three important pieces of sculpture are a male torso in stone, a dancing male in stone and a dancing female in bronze (Plates 5, 6, 7). The carefully modelled male torso conveys a spirit of pent up inner vitality through the convex curves of tautly distended flesh. This is especially true of the swelling abdomen which conveys the awareness of the *prāṇa* or life-breath within, a theme so familiar in the Yakṣa and Yakṣī figures which symbolized the Earth and its fertility at a later time. The dancing figures appear to convey the same sense of inner vitality, but in this case express it in the dynamic form of rhythmic movement. If the Mother Goddess theme is interpreted in relation to the rhythmic vitality expressed in these sculptures, it begins to appear not as a simple interest in fertility and productivity, but as a worship of the rhythmic periodicity of the feminine principle. If the spirit of this bronze dancing girl truly represents the thinking of the Indus people then it is possible to conclude that they saw in the periodic cycle of female life not only the important source of fertility, but a beautiful spirit of rhythmic vitality.

Combining the impression of ascetic authoritarianism and that of the female principle expressed in fertility and rhythmic vitality, a fairly complete picture of the spirit of the Indus Civilization emerges. The worship of the female principle produced in the socio-political realm not heroes and chari-

1. Marshall, Vol. 1, Ch. 5. In a re-examination of this evidence H. P. Sullivan, "A Re-Examination of the Religion of the Indus Civilization," *History of Religions*, IV, 1, 1964, has questioned this identification.

smatic leaders, but priests and custodians of order and regularity. This combination of themes is seen again in the character of the later Śiva who is both the highest ascetic and the *linga*, the source of fertility. It is also seen in the broader socio-political context where the principle of order is reformulated in terms of *dharma*, the stabilizing feminine-like base of the society.[1]

The story of the relationship between this prehistoric civilization and the later Indian civilization is just now beginning to emerge. When Sir John Marshall first presented the archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley sites in 1923 it had to appear as a completely unrelated civilization. All the problems in the early history of the Indian Tradition had been solved on the assumption that there was no earlier civilization in the Indus Valley, and there were no loose ends with which to tie the two together. Reflection on the situation soon began to find loose ends and there are now a host of ways in which it appears the two civilizations might have been related, and archaeology and scholarly imagination are still finding more.

In general, it would appear that the Indus Civilization was linked with the later Tradition more through common ritual activities than through conscious theoretical formulations. While the Indus script has not been deciphered, work on it would indicate that the language was not close to that found in later India.[2] On the other hand the close ties between the later Tradition and the Ṛg Vedic Civilization in the areas of the linguistic and theoretical expression make it unnecessary to look to the Indus Civilization for these roots. Even in an instance where a deity of the later Tradition, such as Śiva, has no clear roots in the Ṛg Vedic Civilization, there is no certain evidence that the origin of this conception can be found in the Indus either.

1. This concept, developed in the Period of *Consolidation*, will be taken up in Chapter V.

2. See *The Vedic Age*, ed. R. C. Majumdar, (London, 1960) for a summary of the attempts made. The recent attempt by some Finnish scholars appears promising, but thus far only preliminary.

It is almost as difficult to establish direct ties between the Indus Civilization and the later Tradition in the area of socio-political expression as it is in the area of theoretical expression. It has been suggested that the socio-political arrangements of the Indus Civilization can be linked with those of Chandragupta Maurya in the Fourth Century B. C.[1] This is an interesting possibility, for Chandragupta was certainly part of a new ruling group and had a radically different conception of society from the one ruled over by the tribal princes who preceded him. That his rule could be described as authoritarian is certainly clear if we accept the traditional association of the *Arthaśāstra* with his court. However, the broad picture of Chandragupta, the conqueror, is not easily associated with a defensive priestly elite. In general it seems better to account for his political activity in terms of the influence of Alexander the Great,[2] who had in that day extended his conquests to the borders of India, than to reconstruct the lines which would have made him aware of a political order that had been overthrown more than a thousand years before. The socio-political order of the Indus Civilization could have influenced the thinking of the later Tradition, but if it did it must have been through the roundabout path of an attitude to life preserved in the ritual patterns of a fallen social order.

The general frame in which the links between the Indus Civilization and the later Tradition must be understood is that of a civilization whose social order was destroyed in a series of military conquests somewhere in the middle of the Second Millenium B. C., whose intellectual life was subsequently moulded by the superior literary tradition of the conquering Aryan peoples, but who still formed a large percentage of the population in the new situation and who in their more private ritual activities and basic attitudes to life still preserved much of their old civilization. As time went on many of these older ritual patterns and attitudes became acceptable within the newly formulated Tradition.

1. Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, (London, 1950), p. 289.

2. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, (New York, 1959), p. 50.

It is generally felt that with North India caught up in the tide of the conquering Aryan culture, the more complete preservation of the Indus spirit is to be found in the South. It seems very likely that Indus influences combined there with other cultural strands to produce the Dravidian characteristics. Thus even today the village fertility cults, the localized forms of Śiva worship, the ordered austerity of the southern way of life and many other ritual patterns show little or no influence of Aryan civilization.[1]

Though obscured to a large extent by the pervasiveness of the Aryan influence it would appear that in the North too one can find traces of the Indus influence on ritual life in the non-literary remains that are available. With the exception of some art in the Mauryan court (Plate 8), which reflects clear stylistic dependence on Persia, the Śunga art of the Second Century B. C. is the earliest known Indian sculpture after that of the Indus Civilization. In spite of a gap of more than a thousand years the Śunga artist seems to carry on the spirit of the Indus art to an amazing degree. The same rich feminine vitality fills the twisting bodies of the Yakśīs. The coursing movement of the vines convey the awareness that the plant, animal and human life around which they flow are but a flux which derives its vitality from the great mother Earth.[2] (Plates 9 and 10).

The Śunga art is found on the gateways and railings of the stupas of Sānchi, Bhārhut and Amarāvatī. At first the Indus spirit so clearly expressed in the decoration of these monuments seems strange in association with the usual Western picture of Buddhism as puritanical and ascetic. But if Buddhist philosophy is re-examined in the light of the unity of subject matter and mood which the Śunga artist conveyed, the strangeness begins to fade away. It is important to remember that the Buddhists were part of a larger movement of non-Aryan ascetics who were very prominent

1. P. T. S. Iyengar, *Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture*, (Madras, 1930) Also interesting in this regard is the work of Father Heras, S. J.

2 See especially N. R. Ray, *Maurya and Śunga Art*, (Calcutta, 1945).
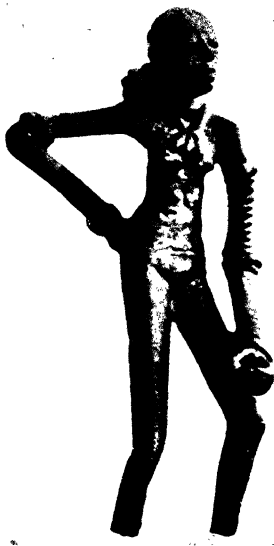
PLATE 7 : Dancing Female in Bronze from Indus Civilization
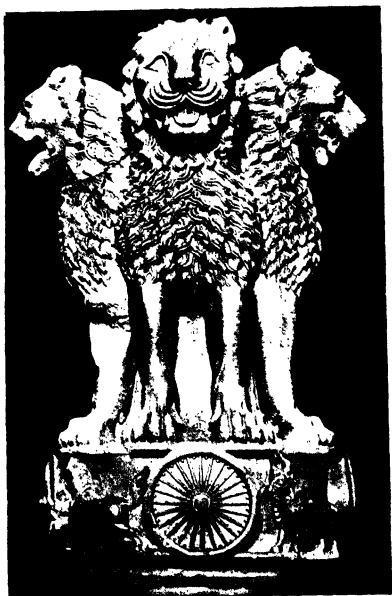
PLATE 8 : Aśokan Lions of the Mauryan Period
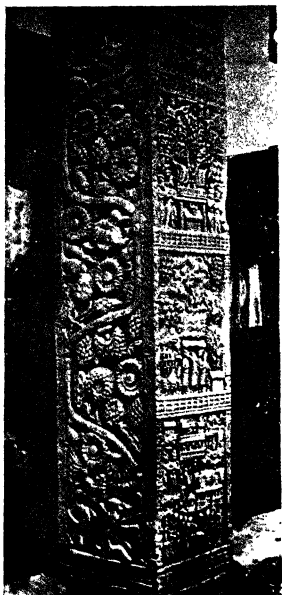
PLATE 9 : Vines on Pillar of the Śunga Period

PLATE 10 : Yakṣī of the Śunga Period

PLATE 11 : Sārnāth Buddha of the Gupta Period

in the Indian intellectual world in the Sixth Century B. C. The Buddhists came closer to their Aryan brothers than any of the other groups, but they were still associated with the more rigidly ascetic Jains and Ājīvakas and probably held very firmly to the philosophical roots from which all these religious groups had sprung.

What the philosophical roots of these groups were can only be reconstructed in an approximate way. Stcherbatsky, the great student of Buddhist philosophy, attempted to analyze these roots and coined the colorful phrase "pre-Buddhaic Buddhism" to define the philosophy of flux he saw underlying the Buddhist texts and refuted in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*.[1] This philosophy of flux which is present in the early Buddhist texts is found in an even more rigid form in the texts of the Jains and Ājīvakas. The latter go as far as defining the flux in atomistic terms and seeing the round in which the flux is arranged as Fate or *Niyati* before which man can do nothing but stand in ascetic obedience.[2] It is hard to draw clear lines of influence in this ancient web of undated sects, but the clear uniting factor is the philosophy of flux which they share. The Śunga sculpture makes it possible to see the connection between this philosophy of flux and the rhythmic vitality of life seen in the art of the Indus Civilization. That Buddhism is more than this early doctrine of flux is obvious, but that it had roots in such a ritualization of life seems almost certain.

The contribution which the Indus Civilization made to the life of the later Indian Tradition was a ritualistic recognition of the impermanent in life. In one form this was an acknowledgement of the feminine principle pervading the universe and an affirmation that the fertility of the earth is never a finished business, but the repeated emergence of life out of death. What form the Indus Civilization would have used to express this in an articulate theology or myth we do

1. Th. Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism* (Calcutta, 1956), p. 41. He refers to *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 4. 14.

2. A. L. Basham, *History and Doctrine of the Ājīvakas*, (London, 1951).

not know. Doubtless at one stage it took the form of animism which is the recognition of the individual spirits of aliveness In more philosophical forms it no doubt became a doctrine of pluralism where many realities moved in a round of flux, and possibly even expressed itself in explicit atomistic theories. Whatever form the theology took, the ritual structure it was intended to articulate clearly said that reality is best seen in the rhythmic movement of female life, and that the socio-political form which would arise out of such a philosophy was one characterized by austere order. The Indian Tradition has not consciously followed its Indus Valley ancestors, but the underlying spirit of its ritualization of life seems to be indebted to their carefully ordered life.

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CHAPTER TWO

ṚG VEDIC CIVILIZATION

The adjective Vedic is usually used to describe the ancient literature of India down to and including the Upaniṣads. This title was given by the Tradition at a later time and was its way of recognizing the authority of all that had gone before. While drawing these texts together for theological purposes, the Indian Religious Tradition never argued that they must be understood as reflecting a single cultural setting. Nevertheless, the use of the word "Vedic" has led to a popular inability to distinguish among these widely differing texts.

From the beginning of the analytical study of the Veda it has been recognized that very different backgrounds underlie these texts, and in particular, that the *Ṛg Veda* comes out of a theological setting very different from that which produced the Upaniṣads. Western scholars at one time tended to exaggerate this difference by misreading the Ṛg Vedic hymns as "this worldly" nature poetry. Their interpretation was challenged by Indian scholars, who, because of the framework of *Śruti* or scriptural authority, had traditionally held the two bodies of literature closely together.[1] Now that the interpretation of both sets of literature has reached a more mature stage, the truth seems to lie somewhere in between. The interpretation of the present work follows the Indian scholars in trying to see the *Ṛg Veda* in the light of the later Tradition's interpretation and in the context of the ritualistic setting and symbolic meaning which seem so

1. The history of Vedic interpretation is exceedingly complex. Two noted scholars who held the positions cited would be M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, 2 vols., (Calcutta, 1927-33) and C. Kunhan Raja, *Poet-Philosophers of the Ṛg Veda*, (Madras : Ganesh and Company, 1963). The work of Westerners such as Lüders, Thieme, and Gonda has gone far beyond the earlier one-sided interpretation.

often indicated. At the same time it describes the Ṛg Vedic Civilization not as a part of the later Indian Tradition, but as an ancestor from which that Tradition drew inspiration when it came to formulate its own unique world view.

The Ṛg Vedic Civilization was one of a large family of Indo-European civilizations. Much of its history was probably set in the homeland of Central Asia from where it moved to India in several stages. It is not very clear what these stages were, but some indication of the later stages may be deduced from the fact that the Ṛg Vedic language was very similar to that of the people who inhabited Ancient Iran and it may be assumed that these two peoples shared some common life before they became enemies and began to call each other's gods "demons". The literature indicates that these people were fond of cattle, horses and chariots, and there is little doubt that at one stage they were a nomadic and warring people.

In this setting the "hero" *(ṛṣi)*[1] emerged as the ideal human type and families and tribes gathered around strong masculine leaders. To be religious was to call upon a "Power" *(deva)* and, striking a deal with him, to go bravely forth to master the chaos personified in your enemies and in the cosmic disorder that threatened your "Power."[2] This heroism in one sense poured forth from the chest of man, but there was also thought to be a mysterious and ecstatic quality about it and Ṛg Vedic men frequently supported the heroic life with a good drink of intoxicating *soma*. In this dynamic world of heroes, life changed quickly and all sorts of "Powers" had to be given their proper dues. One was always on top so there was no need to construct a pantheon, but it soon came to be recognized that the "Power" of the moment had

1. My renderings of the terms *ṛṣi* and *deva* are purposely interpretative. Dictionaries usually translate *ṛṣi* as "sage" and *deva* as "god," but it seems to me these translations fail to indicate what is unique here.
2. A number of studies have been made of the "enemies" of the Ṛg Vedic man. P. Thieme, *Der Fremdling in Ṛgveda*, (Berlin, 1938); Sten Rohde, *Deliver Us From Evil—Studies in the Vedic Ideas of Salvation*, (Lund, 1946).

been drawn from an assemblage of such "Powers" which inhabited the heaven, the earth, and the atmosphere in between.[1] Eventually the poets were able to capture the spirit of this worship in words and some of the earliest and most beautiful of the world's literature was born. Some of this literature is preserved for us in a collection that has come to be called the *Ṛg Veda.*

The *Ṛg Veda*, in its extant form, is a collection of over a thousand hymns arranged in ten books. In these hymns, "heroes" put into words their relation to that which empowers them. While "heroes" might normally be thought of in relation to their exploits among men, and "Powers" in relation to their ordering of the cosmos, in these hymns that distinction is not clear, and the two are seen simply in their confrontation with one another.

The "hero" in this setting becomes the visionary, the poet and the priest, but in none of these roles does he act as a professional functionary. For him each role is simply a vehicle for expressing his heroic leap into the mysterious beyond. At times, his earthly concerns affect his language as when he conceives of the "Power" is addressing as "sitting in a house of many rooms" or as being capable of giving specific gifts such as "herds of cattle" and "long life". However, his purpose is always to catch a "vision" *(dhī)*.[2] This vision is in one sense a relevation or a shining forth of the "Power", but it is at the same time the grasp which the "hero" makes of that divine manifestation. The visionary becomes a poet *(kavi)* when he formulates the vision in words. But the words are not the end of his task either, for the real end of the vision is the sacrifice. In the end, the visionary and poet become the priest, and the heroic life is finally expressed in the sacrifice *(yajña)* which is so built as to represent the sustaining

1. The term "henotheism" was suggested by F. Max Müller to describe this worship of one god at a time. A recent study on the objects of Ṛg Vedic worship is J. Gonda, *Some Observations on the Relations between "Gods" and "Powers" in the Veda apropos of the phrase sūnuḥ sahasaḥ*, (The Hague, 1957).
2. J. Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, (The Hague, 1963).

order (*ṛta*) of the cosmos. Thus, in the cosmic sacrifice, the heroic action of the warrior is united with the heating and watering of the cosmos by the "Powers" to create the high point of Ṛg Vedic worship. Fortunately for us who have failed to keep up that sacrifice some of the spirit thereof is preserved in the words which accompanied the sacrificial symbols.

The "Powers" that populated the "hero's" world were numerous and of various types. Some he experienced primarily in battle, such as the "Power" symbolized in the speed and spirit of his horses (Aśvins), in the inspired bravery of the leading charioteer (Indra), and in the inspiring courage of the intoxicant within (Soma). Others seemed to present themselves more in the lonely nomadic march and were symbolized in the graceful emergence of the feminine Dawn (Uṣas), in the inspiration of the rising sun (Sāvitar), the full heat and light of the noonday sun (Sūrya), or the storm (Rudra) which brought release from careful battle plans. Still others became more important in the context of the established sacrificial harmony where the faithfulness of the fire (Agni), the support of the friend (Mitra), and the power of vows and true speech (Varuṇa) determined the outcome. It seems likely that at one stage some of these "Powers" were known as "*aśuras*" or "mysterious ones" before whom the Ṛg Vedic heroes cringed in fear, but in the hymns of the present *Ṛg Veda*, the "Powers" are usually called "*devās*" or "shining ones" to signify their association with the day and with light and joy generally. The otherness and awesomeness of the "Powers" is certainly present in the hymns of the *Ṛg Veda*, but the note that finally prevails is one in which the hero is full of wonder and joy at the power and wisdom that surrounds him in the universe.

The hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* must be read not primarily as mythical stories about the gods, but as the sole remains of complex ritual structures. In them can be seen the character of the "hero" who cries out, the nature of the experience the "Power" has bestowed upon him, the social background, and the social and cosmic goals to which the "hero"

in union with the "Power" aspires. Some hymns reveal certain elements of this situation more clearly than others, but read in this way they all become living representations of an impressively complex religious spirit.

The following hymn introduces Indra, who appears to be a relatively new "Power" in the situation, but who is set by the vision of his "hero" in a position of preeminence.

Who, the new born, the foremost, the one of spirit, the 'Power'[1]
Has protected the rest of the 'Powers' with his might ;
From the puffing of whom by the greatness of his manliness
The Heaven and Earth trembled,
He, O men, is Indra.

Who fastened the quivering earth,
Who set at rest the moving mountains,
Who stretched out wider the atmosphere,
Who propped up the heaven,
He, O men, is Indra.

Who by slaying the dragon set free the seven rivers,
Who drove out the cows in the cave of Vala,
Who begot the fire between the clouds,
The victor in battles,
He, O men, is Indra.

By whom all this [universe] was set in motion,
Who sent the vile non-Aryan race into hiding,
Who like a gambler having won the pot
Seized the riches of the enemy,
He, O men, is Indra.

1. These translations are my own. (All later translations are also mine unless otherwise indicated.) The only complete translations of the *Ṛg Veda* in English : H. H. Wilson *Rig-Veda Samhita*, 6 vols , (London, 1866), and R. T. H. Griffith, *Hymns of the Rig Veda*, 2 vols., (Beneres : E. J. Lazarus & Company, 1895) can no longer be considered reliable. The best complete translation available is Karl F. Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda*, Harvard Oriental Series, vols. 33-36, (Cambridge, Mass., 1951).

2

Of whom they ask 'Where is the Terror' ?
  And they say 'This one does not exist.'
He reduces the riches of the enemy like the stake of a gambler,
  Put your faith in this one,
He, O men, is Indra.

Who is the inspirer of the weak,
  Who is for the needy,
The head priest, the suppliant, the singer, and the Soma presser,
  Who is the wet lipped helper of the Soma producer,
He, O men, is Indra.

In the domain of whom are horses and cattle,
  Villages and all chariots,
Who gave birth to the sun and the dawn,
  Who is the leader of the waters,
He, O men, is Indra.

Who two armies, meeting in battle, each invoke,
  Both the distant and the near,
Mutual enemies standing together in the chariot,
  Call individually on his name,
He, O men, is Indra.

Without whom men do not conquer,
  Whom battling men call upon for quickening,
Who has made a match for everything,
  Who shakes the unshakeable,
He, O men, is Indra.

Who slew with an arrow,
  The long threatening forces of evil and disorder,
Who yields not to the boaster in boldness,
  Who is the slayer of the dragon,
He, O men, is Indra.

Who discovered in the fortieth autumn
  Sambara, dwelling in the mountains,
Who slew the dragon, spreading in his power,
  The sleeping Danu,
He, O men, is Indra.

Who, like a mighty bull producing seven lines,
Poured out and caused to flow the seven rivers,
Who, vajra-armed, knocked apart Rauhina
As that one mounted the heavens,
He, O men, is Indra.

The heavens and the earth bow down before this one,
The mountains tremble at his puffing,
Who is known as Somadrinker and Vajra-armed,
Who has vajra in hand,
He, O men, is Indra.

Who protects the Somapresser and Somabrewer,
The singer of praise and the doer of sacrifice,
Of whom are the prayer, the Soma, and these gifts,
For the increase of strength,
He, O men, is Indra.

Who art frightening to the Somapresser and Somabrewer,
Certainly you are the one who givest the booty,
That one you are in truth,
O Indra, may we at all times dear to thee
Address the assembly in strength. R. V. 2. 12

This hymn is at once about the heroic power of Indra and the "hero" who is preparing for a meeting of the "assembly." Indra in this hymn is a "Power" which must be understood in a theological framework that would be described as both Shamanistic and Monotheistic. Shamanism is the religious tendency to develop ritual patterns around the power that resides in great men. That power is usually unrelated to the social structures of settled societies and is an uncharted manifestation of the mysterious power in the universe. Monotheism refers to a more ordered expression of power, and the power is usually thought of as creating and ruling the universe as well as manifesting itself in special circumstances. Indra, like the Hebrew Yahweh at one stage, stands on the borderline between these two types. He is known primarily by his exploits in battle, but he is also thought of as the power manifest in all creation.

The "hero" of this hymn appears primarily as a visionary and a charismatic leader in his community. His prayer is for "strength" for the "assembly", but the context leaves us in little doubt that the "strength" of which he speaks is a supernatural endowment and the "assembly" he expects to address is in some measure an expression of cosmic order. While a visionary and charismatic leader, the "hero" of this hymn is also a poet and a priest. He is a poet in that the supernatural "strength" he receives in his vision of Indra is his only as he expresses that vision in the words of our hymn. He is a priest in that he has "ordered" a sacrifice which is being carried out by a number of different priests and features the Soma being "pressed" and "brewed" by carefully trained hands. The total effect of his worship is that the ordering of society in which he participates is made a part of the cosmic ordering in which Indra has been the prime mover. Through the poetry of the hymn the "Power" and the "hero" are united. The "strength" of the former transforms the society of men while the "sacrifice" of the latter helps sustain the order of the cosmos.

In the hymns addressed to Varuna, there is less awareness of the Shamanistic power that manifests itself in battle, and more awareness of the order (*ṛta*) which brings the "Powers" together. With "power" giving way to "order" the images of creation and conflict both fade into the background and more providential and intellectual concerns become central.

O Vasiṣṭa, present to the beautiful Varuṇa
The most tender and unblemished hymn,
That it may bring hither Him who is worthy of worship,
The strong and fruitful one who grants a thousand gifts.
Now, having come to a clear vision of Him,
I thought of the face of Varuṇa as that of Agni.
May the Lord of both the light in the sky and the darkness
Lead me forth to see this wonder.
When Varuṇa and I have mounted the boat,
When we have propelled ourselves to the middle of the sea,
When we are moving along the ridges of the water,
May we be able to swing along in the swelling glide.

Varuṇa has set Vasiṣṭa in the boat.
Good deeds by virtue of their greatness made him a "hero".
The inspired one sings praise in clear times
As long as days endure, as long as dawns.

What has become of these our friendships,
When we of old held unbroken intercourse,
When I entered your lofty mansion, O Sovereign Varuṇa,
Thy house with a thousand doors ?

O Varuṇa, if one who is a constant companion, dear to you of old,
Should commit sins, still he is a friend of you
O Mysterious Spirit; may we not reap the fruit of sin at your hand.
O Inspired One, grant to the one who praises Thee a covering.

Having been caught in these fixed traps,
Release, O Varuṇa, the bonds from us,
Beseeching Thee from the lap of Aditi,
May You protect us with your blessings.

R. V. 7.99

The early Western interpretations of Varuṇa suggested that he was a monotheistic deity, related to Ahura of Ancient Iranian religion, who maintained the ethical standards of the Vedic world and whose cosmological background was some awareness of the overarching sky. Now that the subtlety of the Ṛg Vedic Civilization has been recognized and all the "Powers" are not expected to be personified cosmic phenomena, other suggestions about the identity of Varuṇa have been made. The most interesting is that which uses etymology to establish the meaning of "true speech".[1] Varuṇa has always been a favorite of those who would find similarities between the Indian and Hebrew-Christian concepts of the divine, and the possibility of seeing the name "True Speech" as implying something like the "Covenant God" is tempting but not very helpful. This interpretation of Varuṇa as "True

1. Paul Thieme, *Mitra and Aryaman*, (New Haven, 1957) ; G. Dumezil, *Le Toesieme souverain*, (Paris, 1949) ; and *Mitra-Varuṇa*, (Paris, 1948).

Speech" emphasizes the fact that the "Power" in this case is a loyal companion who becomes the intimate source of stability to the "hero" on the sea of life. Varuṇa is the Lord of order *(ṛta)*, but this is a cosmic order that expresses itself not so much in an austere judgement of the social order as in the quiet lonely order which the poet is able to sense within.

The "hero" who composes this hymn appears more as a poet than as a charismatic leader in the community. While Indra was the "Power" most important to the social order and the one most appreciated in the "assembly" of the powers of the universe, Varuṇa was the "Power" most important in the poet's lonely quest. Here the poet, the "hero" as an individual, aware of the vicissitudes of life, asks that he might not sink in the trough of the sea. He is aware that victory in isolated battles does not necessarily add up to meaning, and also that his own sin curtails his ability to find his way in this sea. His prayer is that he might have the "Ordered Speech" necessary to ride the ridges and swing with the movement of the mysteriously charted sea.

If Indra, the hero, settled the social order, and Varuṇa, the sage, inspired the poetic or intellectual order, it was the job of the "Power" Agni to maintain the ritual order. This was a job which was destined to grow in importance and complexity as the Ṛg Vedic Civilization lost its hold on the other two orders.

I call upon Agni, the official priest of the sacrifice,
The "Power" who is the executor of the sacrifice, and the sacrifical singer too,
The one who lavishly bestows wealth.

Agni is to be praised by "heroes" of old,
And also those of today,
He has brought the "Powers" here to us.

One may gain wealth through Agni,
Even abundance, day after day,
That which gives honor, that which abounds in manly sons.

O Agni, it is the ordered sacrifice,
The one which you encompass on all sides,
That alone reaches to the midst of the "Powers".

Agni, the singer of the sacrifice, is a poet of power,
He is truthful, and exceeds all in luster,
May this "Power" along with the other "Powers" come.

Whatever portion is granted to the worshipper,
You, O Agni, will make it a blessing,
That indeed is your truth, O bestower of portions.

On account of you, O Agni, day after day,
The darkness is made light by a vision.
We come to you bearing homage.

The ruler of the sacrificial liturgy,
The keeper of the cosmic order,
The illuminator growing stronger within your own abode,

Be Thou to us like a father to a son,
Be easy of access, O Agni,
Be united with us for our good.

R.V. 1.1

In this hymn the "Power" no longer appears as a mystery from another world but has come to be thought of as a principle within this world. The ecstatic power which enabled "heroes" to establish the social order seems no longer necessary, for the orderedness of the whole is now taken for granted There is still some of the language of the poetic order as Agni is seen to be the "sacrificial singer" *(hotar)*, who illumines the darkness by his "vision" *(dhīh)*, and who is a "poet *(kavi)* of power". But the new emphasis is on the ritual order which in its regularity ("day by day") and fatalism ("whatever portion") is ruled over by Agni. It is he who makes the assigned portion in the regularity into a "blessing".

The heroic personality of the hymn writer has all but disappeared from this hymn. He views his universe neither as an arena of conflicting forces, nor as a wild restless sea,

but as the ordered regularity of a ritual pattern which on a cosmic scale is very like a sacrifice carried out by a company of priests. His "Power" is like a priest bound by the rules of the system but essential in the maintenance of the order and in the translation of the order into personal well-being. Here the note is on the acceptance of the order and the sense of identity the son feels with Agni the Father. Nevertheless, the heroic vision is not altogether lost, and Agni is still a masculine symbol of the order established by the assembling of the "Powers" of the cosmos and the "heroes" among men. This vision was to influence the later Indian Tradition but it was greatly modified to fit in with that Tradition's more complex cosmological understanding.

The links between the Ṛg Vedic Civilization and the later Indian Tradition are difficult to discern because of the Indian unwillingness to separate the two The Tradition in an attempt to thrust its roots back into the past bound its earliest literature with that of the Ṛg Vedic Civilization and accepted all of it as authoritative revelation (*Śruti*). This was a sound procedure theologically and important in the development of the Tradition, but it has obscured the quest for an accurate historical picture of the earliest period. In particular, the assumption that literary and theological ties bound the Ṛg Vedic Civilization and the Tradition together has led to a lack of clarity about other possible ties in the areas of social theory, philosophy and art.

It is generally thought that the heroic spirit of the *Ṛg Veda* had little or no influence on the social thinking of the Indian Tradition. At first glance this might seem obvious, for the elaborate caste system and cautious priesthood of the Tradition are very unlike the tribal structure and blustering charismatic heroes of the *Ṛg Veda* Attempts to find references to caste and priesthood in the *Ṛg Veda* do not really prove anything, for such references are isolated instances and do not change the overall picture of a tribal nomadic society led by charismatic leaders. More fruitful is the attempt to show that in the Epics and Purāṇas the Tradition has in a new form preserved the idea that history

is the story of the "hero" who triumphs over the routine order of events. The "hero" in this later context does not establish a personal order in a disordered world, but he creatively rises above and reinterprets an order which had come to be accepted. In this sense Gautama, Aśoka, Kṛṣṇa, and in modern times Mahatma Gandhi, have all been understood, like the Ṛg Vedic heroes, as those from among men who also moved among the "Powers" of the universe. However, they were not "heroes" in that they cried out to individual "Powers," but in that they both re-established and rose above the order of *dharma*.[1] Both the authoritarian ascetic note of the Indus Civilization and the heroic note of the Ṛg Vedic Civilization would live on in the social order of the Indian Tradition, but both would be radically transformed to fit a new and different understanding of human life.

Indian scholars have been anxious to counter the early Western interpretation of the *Ṛg Veda*[2] by demonstrating that the "philosophy" of the *Ṛg Veda* is the same as that of the later Indian Tradition. In order to make this point they have relied on three or four hymns in the tenth book of the *Ṛg Veda*[2] which are profoundly philosophical but which also seem to represent late additions to the *Ṛg Veda*[3] and are very unlike most of the rest of this collection. They are proof that some of the later philosophy was able to make its way into the corpus of the *Ṛg Veda*, but they are not proof that the main body of Ṛg Vedic hymns shares the intellectual concerns of the later Tradition.

A better approach to the establishment of intellectual links between the Ṛg Vedic hymns and the later Indian Tradition would be the examination of the goal of the intellectual process as understood in each setting. As sugges-

1 See Chapter V.

2. S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol I, (Cambridge, England, 1957) for instance discusses 10-90 (Puruṣa), 10.121 (Hiraṇyagarbha), and 10.129 (Nāsadīya).

3. J. N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, (Oxford, 1920), p. 17

ted above the goal of the Ṛg Vedic poet was to get above his own sensual imagery to a "vision" (*dhī*) through which he became a participant in the meaning of the universe. In a similar way all the philosophy and art of the later Tradition was an attempt to express a "vision" which, reaching beyond this life, could participate in the meaning of the whole. The Upaniṣads are the purest form in which such a "vision" can be put into words. The Buddha image is the perfect realization of a Ṛg Vedic "vision" translated into the visual arts. The "vision" of the Tradition was not the cry of a single hero to that which inspired him, but was an understanding of the nature of this world which provided a passage to that which was beyond The rootage of the "vision" and therefore the whole intellectual process were to be much more complex in the Tradition than they had been in the Ṛg Vedic Civilization. Nevertheless, when the Buddha declared his message it was the Ṛg Vedic Civilization to which he was indebted for his 'Vision of the Way Beyond' even as it was the Indus Civilization to which he was indebted for the "Feminine Awareness of this World."[1]

Depending on what one means by ritual it is possible to argue either that the later Indian Tradition received its ritual directly from the Ṛg Vedic Civilization by means of the Brahmanic developments or that it in fact received very little of its basic ritual life from this priestly sacrificial system. Ritual practices play an important role in any civilization, but the ritual expression of a civilization has its own history and often anticipates or outlives the social and intellectual expressions of the civilization of which it is a part The texts known as the *Brahmaṇas,* which in the traditional scheme stand between the hymns of the *Saṃhitas*[2] and the poetic speculations of the *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads,* are the most extensive records any civilization has produced of ritual forms which outlived their own social and intellectual background. These texts do echo some of the spirit of the

1. See Chapter III for an analysis of the message of the Buddha.
2. *Ṛg Veda, Sāma Veda, Yajur Veda, Atharva Veda.*

Ṛg Vedic sacrificial system and they are later used by the Tradition as the basis of some mythological speculations. On the other hand, they do not seem to anticipate the profound social and intellectual changes which are going to take place in the succeeding period, nor was the heart of their ritual system, the sacrifice, accepted as central by that Tradition. It would appear that in spite of a literary continuity and many loose strands, the Ṛg Vedic ritual system as such did not live on into the new age.

By the time the symbols of myth and ritual were clearly formulated in the Indian Tradition, the sources of much of the symbolism was lost Tentative links can be established between Viṣṇu and the *Ṛg Veda*, but the sources of Śiva, the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, the Yakśas, the Nāgas, and others cannot be accurately traced. Some of the spirit of the ritual no doubt goes back to the Indus Civilization with its baths, its recognition of the rhythms of fertility, its tree spirits and its obedience to the structures of necessity. Some of the symbolism is made up of isolated strands from the *Ṛg Veda* and the *Brahmāṇas*. Both ritual traditions could have had an influence in providing the ritual background against which the new Indian Religious Tradition was formulated. However, in the early phase of the Tradition it would appear that ritual took second place, and that those who were destined to be the prophets of one of the world's greatest religious traditions gave their primary attention to establishing a new "Vision." Only with the rise of the sectarian movements and their art some five hundred years after the time of the Buddha did the new ritual pattern emerge. By that time links with the ritual of the older Civilizations were not very prominent.

The Ṛg Vedic Civilization, like the Indus Civilization before it, finally saw the centre of its life disappear. In the case of the Indus, its social fabric was destroyed when its defensive walls were overrun by a foreign conqueror.[1] In

1. Recent theories suggest that the sudden disappearance of this civilization might have been caused by a flood, but the evidence for Wheeler's theory of an Aryan conquest still seems strong.

the case of the Ṛg Vedic people, their tribal life and its sacrificial system became irrelevant in the settled life of the Indian plains. In many ways the spirit of both would live on, but not until a new Religious Tradition could be formulated which would find a way of synthesizing the riches of this dual background.

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PART II

FORMULATION OF THE TRADITION

INTRODUCTION

The second phase of Indian religion is the one in which a single authoritative Religious Tradition was formulated out of the variety of mythic viewpoints that pervaded India in the earlier period. This phase of the development covered a number of centuries, but its center can be identified as the Sixth Century B. C. The two most prominent voices which combined in the formulation of the Tradition were those of the Buddha and of the Upaniṣadic seers. Many other voices were present during this period and certain ones such as those of Jain asceticism and Sāṃkhya dualism continued to make themselves heard throughout the history of the Tradition, but it was the Buddha's message and the Upaniṣadic insights which combined to formulate the central religious understanding which was to be the Indian Religious Tradition.

The problem of the relationship between Early Buddhist ideas and those of the Upaniṣadic sages is very complex. It has been customary to think of the Upaniṣadic sages first and to connect them more closely with the Ṛg Vedic Civilization to which their literature was linked in the traditional Canon. When, however, in a study such as the present one, the primary concern is not with literature but with periods of religious development the conventional priority of the Upaniṣads needs to be called into question and the relationship re-examined on historical and theological grounds. The historical evidence may be summarized by saying that while the death of the Buddha can be dated with fair accuracy in 483 B. C., the Upaniṣads can be dated only in the very rough sense of saying that they must have been written over a period of some centuries, some probably earlier and some later than the time of the Buddha Looked at theologically, it would appear that the initiative responsible for the dynamic religious spirit of the period was the very specific fourfold message of the Buddha. While the message

of the Buddha created the new atmosphere, it was the more scholarly Upaniṣadic seers who in their reinterpretation of the Ṛg Vedic Civilization provided much of the rich substance of the new formulation.[1]

In the present analysis the religion of this period is characterized as "prophetic". This characterization identifies this period as that phase in the history of the Tradition when visionaries "spoke out". This period is distinguished from the earlier one in that the rich variety of mythic views and rituals characteristic of that period is now re ordered around a central religious message. It is also distinguished from the later "dogmatic" and "critical" periods which were attempts to further establish and then to re-think that earlier vision. The "prophetic" period is not one in which myth, dogma and critique are totally lacking, but one in which their role is subordinate to that of the visionary message

Western scholars were immediately attracted by the visions of the "prophets" in this period, but found the complexity of the later periods much more difficult to

1. This is not the proper place for a thorough examination of the evidence against the widely current argument that "Buddhism is nothing but a reaction against Brahmanism, and it presupposes the existence of the whole Veda, i e, the literature consisting of the Brāhmaṇas, Āranyakas and Upaniṣads." (Argument of F. Max Müller, *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* [1859] repeated by M. Winterwitz, *History of Indian Literature* [1907, 1926, 1962]. p. 355). This argument seems to go beyond the evidence for there are no Upaniṣadic quotations in the whole of the Pāli Canon. (E. J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought*, [London, 1933] chapter 7; and N. Dutta, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, [Calcutta, 1960] p. 1). Others (Hopkins, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 22. 336) have gone to the opposite extreme and have argued that all the Upaniṣads are from after the time of the Buddha For our purposes it is sufficient to say that the overall interpretation of Buddhism as just a reaction against Brahmanism is no longer tenable. In my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *The Birth of the Indian Religious Tradition, Princeton University*, I presented some of the evidence for the originality of the Buddha's religion. However, further studies must be undertaken to clarify the nature of the literary and intellectual interdependence of the Early Buddhists and the Upaniṣadic seers.

understand. As a result, Western books on Indian religion have marked off this period with unusual clarity and have allowed it to dominate and sometimes completely obscure that which was to follow. Subsequent scholarship has been slowly correcting this picture, and there is now a general understanding of the mythological and ritual context out of which these prophetic ideas arose and a growing interest in untangling the still somewhat obscure later developments to which these prophetic ideas gave rise. It is important that Early Buddhism and the Upaniṣads be seen not as the whole of Indian religion, but as the prophetic messages on the basis of which that Tradition was formulated.

CHAPTER THREE

EARLY BUDDHISM

The phenomenon of the Buddha is the "starting point" of the Indian Religious Tradition. The Buddha made use of elements in the Indus Valley and Ṛg Vedic Civilizations, but was essentially a creative and original genius. As such he became the point from which the Indian Tradition, as it developed throughout the later centuries, took its distinctive character. In a sense he was a "starting point" in the historical story of the Indian Tradition, but what is more important, he was the "starting point" in that he represented the theological point to which the later stages in the Tradition looked in order to identify its distinctive character and orientation.

The story of the Buddha's relations with his religious background has been a matter for much speculation and some controversy. The normal difficulty in solving this kind of problem is compounded by the fact that the extensive Buddhist scriptures which reflect this early period have been preserved by two different groups, each of which appears to have rewritten whatever originals existed The Pāli Canon, which was accepted by the Buddhists of Ceylon and of Southeast Asia is complicated by extensive instruction in monastic discipline and ritual, while the Sanskrit Canon of Northern Buddhism tends to be more philosophical and more open to the rich mythology of the Indian world.

When the scholars of Northern Europe began their investigations of Early Buddhism, they assumed it was a movement of reform, much as their own Protestant Reformation had been.[1] In order to sustain this picture of the

1. Among the many scholars who took this position probably Mrs C. A. F Rhys Davids, *The Birth of Indian Psychology and Its Development in Buddhism*, (London, 1920), and many other works, was the most notorious. A thorough reassessment of the many problems in the interpretation of Early Buddhism is contained in G. C. Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, (Allahabad, 1957).

Buddha as an anti-ritual ethical reformer opposing the sacrificial system these scholars were obliged to ignore the philosophical scriptures of Northern Buddhism and to label them as borrowings from the Hindu neighbors, and they were also obliged to demonstrate that a kernel of the "original gospel" could be discerned in the Pāli Canon in spite of the extensive additions of the ritual minded monks. The picture of the Buddha that remained after these extensive operations was so foreign to the Indian Religious Tradition that Western scholarship, following its own logic, made him the founder of a separate religious tradition.

Scholarly work on the Sanskrit and Pāli Canons did not support either the view that the first was a late borrowing from Hindu neighbors or that the second could be divided into "original gospel" and "monkish accretions".[1] Analyses of Buddhist philosophy revealed that it was not a late borrowing from Hinduism, but a creative and early part of Buddhism with possible pre-Buddhaic roots.[2] Confirming the complexity of early Buddhism, the earliest Buddhist art was seen to be richly embellished with old and complex mythological symbols.[3] Gradually the Western interpretation of the Buddha moved in the direction of the traditional Indian interpretation which had seen the Buddha as an integral part of the early Indian Religious Tradition.

With the Buddha returned to the Indian Religious Tradition, it again became possible to ask the basic question as to what his relation was to the Indus Valley and Ṛg Vedic Civilizations that went before him. The general answer to this question seems to be that there was a radical discontinuity between the earlier Civilizations and the message of the Buddha. Buddhism was neither a revolt against nor a continuation of the religion that went before it in the Indian

1. A. B. Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, (London, 1923) stands out as one of the first to move away from the earlier interpretation.
2. Th. Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism*, (London, 1923).
3. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, (Cambridge, Mass.; 1935).

subcontinent. It was an original creative development that understood the religious problem in a new way and set forth a "Way" of dealing with that problem which could not be compared with any other religious system then known. Nevertheless, while the understanding of religion was totally new, one can discern the influence of the ritual life of the Indus Valley Civilization and the heroic conception of the *Ṛg Veda* on the underlying ideas that were used to expound the basic message of the Buddha. The idea of the "transcience of all life", first seen in the context of the fertility worship of the Indus Valley Civilization, seems to underlie the Buddhist conception of momentariness *(anitya)*. Similarly, the Ṛg Vedic conception of the "hero" seems to lie behind the early idea of the Arhat and the later idea of the Bodhisattva. These ideas support the Buddhist religious structure, but they do not fully explain the central creative message through which the Buddha was to become instrumental in establishing the Indian Religious Tradition.

The importance of the life of Gautama the Buddha in explaining the nature of Early Buddhism was not as great as has sometimes been thought. It was understandable that pious Buddhists down through the ages should write legendary accounts of the life of the Buddha as a model for human life. These accounts reveal something of the faith of those Buddhists, but very little about the life of the man Gautama. It is also understandable that Nineteenth Century Westerners, just in the midst of trying to find the Historical Jesus, should attempt to use their newfound methods on the lifestories of the Buddha as well. These attempts reveal something of the faith of the men who made them, but do little except rearrange the legends of the Buddha. The importance of the legends is that they put living flesh on the four points of the Buddha's theological message. Here, as in Buddhist art, the emphasis was on the moment of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was preceded by a miraculous Birth through which the Buddha becomes one with the world of pain, and by a Renunciation in which he makes clear the inevitable

and universal character of this pain. The Enlightenment is followed by a life of teaching and a *Parinirvāna*[1] through which the Way to Enlightenment is affirmed. These legends are not useful as a reflection of the religious situation in Sixth Century North India, nor are they actual accounts of a man's search for truth, but they are the legendary clothing of a message that was considered a revelation of the true religious experience of Enlightenment.

The message of the Buddha which was revealed to the Indian religious world of the Sixth Century B. C was preserved by the Buddhist Sangha in the form of an ancient Indian physician's fourfold prescription. This formula is known as the "*aryasatya*", literally "the inspired community's statement of things as they are", more commonly called the "Noble Truths."

> And what are these four ?
>
> The Aryan truth about suffering ; the Aryan truth about the cause of suffering ; the Aryan truth about the cessation of suffering ; and the Aryan truth about the path that leads to that cessation. (D. II. 90)[2]

These Four Truths taken together comprise a complete theological[3] system. The vision of the cessation of suffering in Nirvāṇa determines what could be meant by the truth that "all of life is suffering". Similarly, the path that leads to the cessation of suffering is the counterpart of the process of development which is the cause of suffering. None of these truths stand by themselves and none can be interpreted as if they were empirical observations about the amount of suffering in the world, what causes it or how it might be

1. Death understood simply as the passing to a higher stage of Enlightenment
2. References are to the Pāli edition of the Pali Text Society. For consistency I have continued to use Sanskrit spellings. I trust Pali scholars will understand. The differences would be *duḥkha-dukkha* ; *anitya-anicca* ; *anātman-anatta* ; etc.
3. The term "theological" is here used in its broadest sense not only to refer to a speculative doctrine of God but to any systematic formulation of religious truth.

eliminated. They are not about suffering in that sense, but are the result of a wrestling with the ultimate religious problem, the problem of human existence.

The most important question in Buddhism and hence in the whole of the Indian Religious Tradition is, "what did the Buddha mean by *duḥkha* or suffering ?" Traditionally there have been two somewhat different lines of interpretation, depending on whether one saw the second or the third truth as the key to the interpretation of the first. Those who saw the second truth as the key to this theological system tended to interpret *duḥkha* primarily in psychological terms, as a description of the experienced reality of the world.[1] On the other hand, those who saw the third truth as the key tended to interpret *duḥkha* in philosophical terms as the way of speaking about a world which is essentially an unreal distortion of the Ideal or *Nirvāṇa*.[2] Each of these interpretations contains an aspect of the truth as the Buddha saw it. The message of the Buddha was an attempt to combine the two very different human tendencies of living primarily within the realm of the experienced, and of disdaining what is experienced and attempting to model a new world. Buddhism was more than a synthesis, but it was more in that it could combine and transcend at the same time. The "Middle Way" was not a compromise but a great synthetic vision.

When the Buddha said that "all of life is *duḥkha*" he was saying something which was at once experientially sound and existentially incisive.

> Now this, brethern, is the Aryan Truth about suffering : Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, likewise sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation, and despair. To be conjoined with things which we dislike, to be separated from things which we like—that

1. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, (New York, 1962) holds this interpretation along with much of the Theravada or Southern tradition.

2. T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, (London, 1955) holds this interpretation along with much of the Mahayana or Northern tradition.

also is suffering. Not to get what one wants—that also is suffering. In a word, this body, this fivefold mass which is based on grasping, that is suffering. (S.V. 420)

When the Buddha spoke of *duḥkha* he did not have reference to some selfevident truth logically derived but to a concept rooted in the experience of every man. Every man knows the drama of birth, the sorrow of death, and the range of unfortunate separations and associations that fall in between. The addition which the Buddha made to this general experiential knowledge was to point out the existential concern which arises when one becomes aware of the inevitability of this kind of pain. The Buddha saw the inevitability of pain as the central fact of existence. This insight was not based on a quantitative observation of society but on an awareness of the nature of the depth of human experience. The depth of human experience as the Buddha understood it was based on the very elaborate philosophical position that is hidden in the second truth[1].

The Second Truth states that there is an arising or cause of suffering and that *duḥkha* is not just a simple empirical fact The cause or explanation of suffering is to be seen in the nature of the cosmos. In later Buddhist systems the cosmos or the universe is said to have three characteristic marks or *lakṣaṇās* : *anitya*, *anātman* and *duḥkha*. These are not to be understood as three complimentary characteristics, but as three different ways of looking at the whole. From the epistemological point of view the world may be said to be *anitya* or unstable, from the metaphysical point of view this unstable whole is *anātman* or substanceless, and from the ethical point of view, the whole confronts the individual involved as *duḥkha* or painfulness.

The Second Truth develops the concept of *anitya* or demonstrates the epistemological character of the experience of *duḥkha*. *Duḥkha* does not arise in the sense that it once did not exist and suddenly comes into existence, but it

1. See also my Ph. D. thesis at Princeton University entitled *The Birth of the Indian Religious Tradition or Studies in the Concept of Duḥkha*, 1965.

"arises" in the sense that it continually manifests itself to man's experience through his awareness of the instability of all things. The Buddhist outlines the specific nature of this instability in terms of the twelve stage wheel called *pratītya-samutpāda* ("dependent origination"). While the description of these stages can begin at a number of different points on the wheel, the most common is the epistemological order in which ignorance (*avidyā*) is the cause of activities (*saṃskāra*), which in turn is the cause of consciousness (*vijñāna*), which in turn is the cause of the sixfold sense sphere (*ṣaḍāyatana*), which in turn is the cause of contact (*sparśa*), which in turn is the cause of feeling (*vedanā*), which in turn is the cause of craving (*tṛṣṇa*), which in turn is the cause of grasping (*upādāna*), which in turn is the cause of becoming (*bhava*), which in turn is the cause of birth (*jāti*), which in turn is the cause of the suffering (*duḥkha*) experienced as old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief and despair. Taken as a whole, this scheme of "dependent origina tion" establishes the fact that whatever appears to be experienced reality is *anitya* or unstable and transient. Life is *duḥkha* or painful in that it is transient and all the realities and meanings that might be grasped slip away. Seen in this perspective it can be established that the Buddhist idea of *duḥkha* is just the religiously relevant dimension of a previously established philosophy of transience and flux.

One of the important questions in the study of Buddhism is whether the philosophical position implied in this Second Truth was fully developed in the pre-Buddhist period and was borrowed by the Buddhists, or whether it was a position which developed side by side with Buddhist theology. Certain Nineteenth Century students of religion were inclined to think that philosophy was a comparatively complex phenomenon which superseded earlier and simpler religious notions [1] Influenced by this view, the early Western students of Buddhist thought assumed that the original

1. F. M Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy*, (London, 1912) is a late but brilliant expression of this view.

message of the Buddha had been very simple but that before that message was recorded philosophy, mythology and ritual had all slipped in. As pointed out above, this view was challenged on every count and has now been set aside. The most dramatic challenge to the view of an original simple Buddhism came in the work of Th. Stcherbatsky, called *The Central Conception of Buddhism.*[1] In this work Stcherbatsky outlined the philosophy of the *Abhidharma Kośa* of Vasubandhu, a text dating from somewhere between the First and Fifth Centuries A. D., and concluded that the philosophy found therein could be distinguished from Buddhism and was indeed pre-Buddhaic. As seen in the *Abhidharma Kośa,* reality is made up of seventy-five *dharmas* or infinitely small and infinitely shortlived elements, seventy-two of which are in constant commotion and flux. Philosophically this position is very like the one which, as Stcherbatsky points out, is called into question in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad,* and like the one which we pointed out earlier must have developed in the sects influenced by the Indus Civilization.[2] Assuming that Buddhism did take over a philosophy of flux which antedated it in North India, the creative addition of the Buddhists was to indicate that the ultimate goal of the world process was to bring about the appeasement and final extinction of this flux. They recognized this description of the universe, not as a simple unalterable fact, but as the origin of the spiritual experience of *duḥkha* or suffering and hence the basis, not for pessimism, but for a salvation theory that would bring about the elimination of this flux.

The Third Truth of the Buddhists states that even as one can discern the origination of *duḥkha,* so one can know its cessation. This truth is not simply an extension of the previous truth. There is nothing in the philosophy of flux itself that provides for the hope of its extinction and the other sects which shared this philosophy with the Buddhists tended to accept Fate (*Niyati*) as the ultimate that man could know. The Buddhists themselves could not be satis-

1. See also Chapter One

2. Chapter One.

fied with this. They were willing to accept the description of life as painful, but they also held to the vision of a pure perfect Reality. No doubt the Buddhist conception of *Nirvāṇa* was indebted to the visionary character of the Ṛg Vedic Civilization that preceded it in India. The vision (*dhī*) of the Vedic heroes was initially related to certain specific powers within the universe, but gradually the inherent character and power of the *dhī* itself, which had always been recognized, came to be seen as the purest and most ultimate of realities. In a related development within the orthodox schools, this vision was to develop into the concept of *Brahman* that will be examined in the next chapter. In the Buddhist context, the vision was summed up in the simple but penetrating idea of *Nirvāṇa* (non-breath). Technically *Nirvāṇa* was woven into even the *Abhidharma Kośa's* system as one of the three *dharmas* which were not characterized by the usual instability. Even this extension of the system was an acknowledgement that *Nirvāṇa* stands outside the system and that in early Buddhism the ultimate and central conception, while present in all its fullness, was something about which nothing could be said.

Nirvāṇa was the Early Buddhist's way of pointing to the clear and perfect "vision" which was for him the Ultimate Reality. As the clear and perfect vision, it represented the "other shore" which was seen only in its otherness. In one sense this otherness implied the negation and distance of all that was on this shore, but for the Buddhist this negation never became an insistence on the unreality of this world, but rather an assertion of its transcendability The Third Buddhist Truth is the earliest known assertion of the possibility of salvation. Earlier religious systems had indicated that aspects of life could be rectified and even that there were visions that could penetrate the worlds beyond. The truths of early Buddhism recognized the all pervasive nature of the world's sickness, and at the same time, insisted that a salvation that would completely transcend this sickness was possible. On the surface these two emphases on the nature

of the world's sickness and the possibility of a complete salvation seem contradictory, or at least emphasize two somewhat divergent tendencies in the history of religions. The fact that the Buddhists brought these two tendencies into a working harmony can be seen in the Fourth Truth which outlined the way to salvation.

The Fourth Buddhist Truth is a statement of the eight steps in the "way" to salvation. Understood mystically these steps are roughly parallel to the stages in the "mystic way" that have been observed in other religious traditions. "Right views" and "right resolve" are the Buddhist parallel to the "purgative" stage in which the natural intellect and will are oriented for the quest ahead. "Right speech", "right conduct" and "right livelihood" are roughly parallel to the "illumative" stage in which the soul is re-oriented to its new environment. And, finally, "right effort", "right mindfulness" and "right concentration" are the Buddhist parallel of the "unitive" stage in which the soul looses itself in a oneness with the vision to which it was called. Understood in the ethical terms of the Theravada the first two were interpreted as understanding (*prajña*), the next three as moral discipline (*śila*), and the last three as concentration (*samādhi*). This "Way" in its original form was a perfect synthesis of a religious heritage rooted in an animist-like determination to come to grips with the powers within the things of this world and so to order those things as to triumph over them, and an attempt to reach through a vision the perfect and the true beyond. The history of Buddhism is the story of the failure of the attempts to keep this synthesis together as the moralists interpreted Buddhism primarily as a set of disciplines and the philosophers interpreted it as wisdom's quest for the pure vision. While the synthesis could not be held in perfect balance, Buddhism nevertheless continued to combine the power of ritual action and the illumination of poetic vision. Such a combination it has remained to this day shining through the vicissitudes of a complex history.

The Buddhist contribution to the establishment of the Indian Religious Tradition is singularly important. As was suggested at the beginning of the chapter, Buddhism is the "starting point" of the Tradition in that it provides a historical point of origin and it sets the tone of the spiritual quest for the whole of the Tradition. The Indian Tradition does not recognize history as the scene of God's revelation and does not expect that out of history will come truths that define the Ultimate. But the Indians do recognize the realm of history in another sense and are capable of looking back across the stream of their Tradition. In looking back they see the phenomenon of early Buddhism as the point from which their faith Tradition springs This is not to say that they agree completely with the early Buddhists or that they see no religious life in the earlier periods. It just means that in the development of the Tradition to which they belong, this is the furthest they can go. What Buddhism had which they were all destined to share was an awareness of the all pervasive round of existence and a vision by which that round could be transcended Many Indians of the later Tradition were not able to see with the Buddhist clarity that "all of life is suffering" or to see that the "other shore" was a pure unnameable puffing out of the lights of this shore. The Buddhist solution was clearly a radical one.[1] As a monastic community it would by definition need the sympathetic support of a broader and more conservative community. Such support it was to receive for about a thousand years until this radical element in the Indian Religious Tradition began to fade and to be preserved primarily in the religious memory of the wider community.

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1. The place of Jainism and the other non-orthodox movements in this period of *Formulation* is of course important. They are not described in more detail here because their role in the formulation of the Tradition is to provide background for the more creative role of the Buddha.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE UPANIṢADS

The Upaniṣads are the kind of documents that do not fit easily into a historical analysis. They are not easy to place in relation to fixed chronological points, and they are idolized by the type of person who has no use for history. Many books on Indian religion or Indian philosophy leave the impression that Upaniṣadic thought pervades all of India and that it can be found in all times and places as the "perennial philosophy." This may be the proper role of "Upaniṣadic philosophy", but the texts known as the Upaniṣads are rooted in a historical setting and can be dated and analyzed within that context.

There are more than a hundred texts which take the name "Upaniṣad." These were written at various times in the course of the Tradition and are not a reflection of any one period or even of any one religious tendency. About a dozen of these have been identified as having a language and thought form typical of the period in which early Buddhism arose. This small group of Upaniṣads, sometimes called the "Principal Upaniṣads", vary a great deal one from the other. Some are in prose and others in verse, some are three pages long and others one hundred, and some seem to hold a Monist theological position and others a Theist one. Some are probably composites of two or more earlier works, butthey have not been radically rearranged as the early Buddhist texts have been, and it is reasonably accurate to speak of the theology of, for instance, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* or the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad.*

The early attempts of Western scholars to put these twelve texts in chronological order relied heavily on a theory of theological development which saw a pristine Monist philosophy give way to a less philosophical Theism.[1] This theory might be called into question on a number of grounds. one

1. Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*, (London, 1906).

of the most important being that it provides no way of explaining the relation between this early Monism and the ideas of the Civilizations that preceded it. But the main problem with this theory of theological development is that the type of dogmatic theology which it presupposes is entirely foreign to the *Upaniṣadic texts themselves*. These texts do not contain systematic statements about the nature of the Ultimate, the nature of the universe, the nature of man, or the nature of his salvation, and hence cannot be read as dogmatic theology in that sense. It is true that they are closer to theology than are either the hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* or the ritual and ethical instructions which occupy so much of the early Buddhist texts, but they are theological only in that they record the final unveiling of an insight into the ultimate nature of reality by the teacher to his pupil. Hence, the variety among them is not that of theology, but of approach to the spiritual way.

When looked at from the point of view of approach to the spiritual goal, the Upaniṣads can be divided into a number of different groups. The earliest group would appear to be the rather long texts, principally in prose, which begin from complex and sometimes obscure mythic discussions and proceed from there to an awareness of Brahman and Ātman. This groups includes the *Aitareya* the *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka* the *Chāndogya*, the *Kauṣītakī*, and the *Taittirīya*. A second group, usually in verse, tends to be short and seems concentrated on one or two clear lines of argument. This group includes the *Kena*, the *Kaṭha*, the *Īśa*, the *Śvetāśvatara*, and the *Muṇḍaka*. Finally, there is a third group which goes back to a prose style and answers random sets of questions which arise on the spiritual path. This group would include the *Praśna*, the *Māṇḍūkya*, and the *Māitrī*.[1]

The relation between the Upaniṣads and the Civilizations that preceeded them in India is difficult to describe accurately. One might begin by emphasizing that the world

1. This listing is a modification of that suggested by A. B. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, 2 vols, Harvard Oriental Series 31–32, (Boston, 1925).

view of the Upaniṣads was new and was unknown in either of the earlier Civilizations. By the time of the Upaniṣads it was assumed that life is a great cycle of creation, destruction and recreation known as *saṃsāra* The individual soul participates in this cycle by being reincarnated in a variety of forms according to a law of rewards and punishments for actions done called the law of *karma*. In Upaniṣadic thought this was a mature and clearly conceived world view, but with the texts so carefully limited to a discussion of "insights" on the spiritual path it is impossible to reconstruct the ritual life and social organization that underlay it.

Any attempt to find a direct connection between this world view and the ideas of the Indus Civilization falls apart, since without one's being able to read the Indus script interpretations of that Civilization's ideas are only conjecture, and, on the other hand, without artistic remains which reflect Upaniṣadic ritual there is no way of knowing if later echoes of the Indus artistic spirit were heard in the setting of the Upaniṣadic schools. One can only keep in mind that the ideas of *karma* and *saṃsāra* are not adequately explained in terms of Ṛg Vedic thinking, and their general similarity to the rhythmic pattern of agricultural life and the ordered ascetic spirit of the Indus Civilization makes it tempting to think that somehow ritual patterns inherited from the Indus may have influenced thinking in the Upaniṣadic schools.

The relationship between the Upaniṣads and the *Ṛg Veda* was based on a direct and extensive literary dependence. In the later reassembling of the Canon of *Śruti* texts, each Upaniṣad was identified with a Vedic "school" which had as its head a Saṃhitā text, usually a Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka text, and finally, two or three Upaniṣads. Sometimes there was a literary or theological theme that was common to the "school," but it would appear that this was not always the case. The authors of the Upaniṣads did not feel limited by the theology of the earlier texts, but they

very frequently did take mythological themes or unanswered questions from those texts as their starting point.

An accurate picture of the Upaniṣadic teachers' attitude toward the Civilizations that went before them could be outlined only if we had records of their communal life which reflected the process of ritual and social change they were a part of. In the absence of such an account, it seems safe on the basis of the general patterns observable in this period to say that the Upaniṣadic teachers were caught up in a general change which in ritual life gave less importance to the older sacrifice and in social life allowed non-Brahmans to speak on theological issues. Whether they went further and consciously followed some non-Vedic ritual or social patterns is very difficult to say. They would certainly have been considered theological radicals by the Ṛg Vedic theological schools if such voices were still to be heard. However, from the point of view of later history, they do not stand out as radicals. In relation to the Buddhists of the same period they were "traditionalists" who sought to make some sense of the Ṛg Vedic myths and theological language even as they reformulated a new theology based on the world view of *saṃsāra* and *karma.*

In form the Upaniṣadic contribution differed from the Buddhist in that while the Buddhists set before the Indian theological world a single fourfold "message", the Upaniṣads presented a variety of "insights" into the nature of Reality. The Upaniṣads are records of private seminars between teacher and pupil in which a secret or mysterious word was passed as the pupil sat *(sad)* down *(ni)* beside *(upa)* his teacher. In this sense they were in the Ṛg Vedic tradition which had accepted the spiritual power of both the vision *(dhī)* expressed in the hymn and the words of the hymn itself. In the Upaniṣadic context the power of the "word" or "insight" was still there but the authority had come to reside, not so much in the word itself, but in the teacher who unveiled the word to the pupil. Extended in later periods of the Tradition this idea came to mean that there was sacred

power and authority in the transmission of the Truth through the Tradition, and *Śruti* became the sacred Truth passed on through a long succession of teachers, each of whom heard (*śru*) it from another.

The "insights" of the Upaniṣadic seers reveal that they lived in the same universe as their Buddhist colleagues. Along with the Buddhists they accepted the fact that the universe was a complex order ultimately issuing in painfulness. The nature of this order was seen more in cosmological than in psychological terms so that the twelve stages of "dependant origination" were interpreted as steps in the cosmic round (*samsāra*). In both cases the order of the universe was seen as made up of ages and worlds which tend to dwarf the little space and time in which men live, and man was seen experiencing the current about him as something destined to carry away all that to which he might cling. In the case of the Buddhists this world view was dramatically summed up in the phrase "all of life is *duḥkha*". The Upaniṣadic seers who had no immediate need for such a single dramatic phrase talked about the transparent character of experienced realities and tried to reinterpret them as symbols pointing to a seed or essence within. Experienced realities were painful to the Upaniṣadic seers as much as they were to the Buddhists, but they were not only painful but also revelatory symbols of that which lay behind. While the Buddhist description had led to a "way" which was a dramatic transcending of this life, the Upaniṣadic description led to an understanding of life which dissolved experienced realities in their very acceptance.

The name which the Upaniṣadic seers gave to the world of experience when it had been properly "known" was "*māyā*". This term itself does not appear frequently in the Upaniṣads and is more properly the later Tradition's clarification of the Upaniṣadic ideas.[1] *Māyā* is a way of referring to the world of experience so as to bring out its illusory nature. The world of experience is illusory both in that

1. See discussion of Śaṅkara in Chapter Six.

it is not "real" in the final analysis, and in that it "deludes" man into thinking that it is real. In this latter sense the world of experience is a mysterious power which creates ignorance and must be overcome if one is to know the Ultimate and attain salvation.

The all important "knowing" of the Upaniṣadic man comes about through a careful and systematic shedding of "ignorance". In some ways this process partakes of the dramatic quest seen in the Ṛg Vedic grasping after the "Powers" of the universe and in the Buddhist devotion to the "way". However, in the Upaniṣads this note of quest is limited to the first stages in the process where the pupil demonstrates his devotion and longing by choosing to seek that which is "good" rather than that which is "easy" or that which is "fine" rather than that which is "crude". In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* the quest is outlined in terms of a dramatic situation in which a youth, Naciketas, cursed by his father to the realm of Yama (Death) is kept waiting by Yama and so wins three boons. His third choice is to know the destiny of the departed and as Yama tries to dissuade him, he remonstrates passionately and Yama is forced to begin his instruction :

Naciketas : There is this doubt about the man who is departed; one says he exists and another that he does not exist. I would be instructed by you on that knowledge. This is the third of my boons.

Yama : Even the "Powers" of old had doubts on this point. It is not easy to know. Subtle is this supporting truth (*dharma*). Choose another boon, Naciketas. Do not force me. Release me from this.

Naciketas : Even the "Powers" had doubts and you, O Death, say it is not easy to understand. Another like you who can convey this "word" cannot be found. No other boon can be compared to this.

* * *

(Yama tempts Naciketas with wealth and long life, but he refuses.)

Naciketas : That which they doubt, O Death, what is in the great "passing-on", Tell us that. That boon which penetrates the mystery and no other, will Naciketas choose.

Yama (beginning to teach) : The good is one thing and the pleasant is another Both with differing purpose bind a man. Of the two, the one taking hold of the good becomes pure while the one who chooses the pleasant fails in his purpose. Both the good and the pleasant come to a man, but passing his mind over them the wise (visionary, *dhī*) discriminates between them.

* * *

Not by clever logic is this mental state reached, but the highest is fully known as something conveyed in a "word" from another. You have obtained it by holding fast to truth. O Naciketas may we find a questioner like you.

Kaṭha : 1. 1. 20-1. 2. 9.

Once the quest has begun, the dispelling of ignorance is not so much a matter of grasping as it is of gaining "in" sight through an analysis which turns simple phenomena into symbols of that which lies behind. Thus in the famous passage from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* :

"Bring hither a fig from there." "Here it is, sir." "Break it." "It is broken, sir." "What do you see there ?" "These extremely fine seeds, sir." "Of these, please break one." "It is broken, sir." "What do you see there ?" "Nothing at all, sir." Then his father said to Śvetaketu : "Verily, my dear, that subtle essence which you do not perceive—from that very essence, indeed, my dear, does this great fig tree thus arise. Believe me, my dear, that which is the subtle essence—this whole world has that essence for its Self ; that is the Real (*satya*, truth) ; that is the Self ; That art thou, Śvetaketu." "Still further may you, O venerable sir, instruct me." "So be it, my dear," said he.

"Having put this salt in the water, come to me in the morning." He did so. Then the father said to him :

"That salt which you put in the water last evening—please bring it hither." Even having looked for it, he did not find it, for it was completely dissolved. "Please take a sip of water from this end," said the father. "How is it ?" "Salt". "Take a sip from the middle," said he "How is it?" "Salt " "Take a sip from that end," said he. "How is it ?" "Salt". "Throw it away and come to me." Śvetaketu did so thinking to himself : "That salt, though unperceived, still persists in the water." Then his father said to him : "Verily, my dear, you do not perceive Being in this world ; but it is, indeed, here only : That which is the subtle essence—this whole world has that essence for its Self. That is the Real. That is the Self. That art thou, Śvetaketu." *Chāndogya* : 6. 12. 13

Once the pupil is aware of the symbolic nature of experienced reality the teacher can take him on to the discussion of the nature of the Self. The Upaniṣadic Self, or *Ātman*, cannot be directly understood as might the individual consciousness or the individual personality. Something of the *Ātman* can be known by reaching beyond such levels of experience as when, for instance, one knows the self of wakefulness, of dreamy sleep, of dreamless sleep, and of beyond dreamless sleep in progressive stages. A less experiential "insight" into the Self describes it as a succession of sheaths starting from the external "body" and moving through "breath", "mind", and "consciousness" to "bliss". If one is capable of "knowing" one's selfhood in such depth one is close to a knowledge of the *Ātman*. However, the complete "knowing" can come only when one discovers the "That" (*tat*) which lies behind the universe and then recognizes It as the deepest Self.

The "That" which lies behind the universe is spoken of as *Brahman*. *Brahman* is not unrelated to the cosmic order recognized by the Ṛg Vedic poets or to the unknown other shore of the Buddhists called *Nirvāṇa*. But in contrast to the Vedic cosmic order the Upaniṣadic *Brahman* is one step further so that it transcends all cosmic orders, and in contrast with the Buddhist *Nirvāṇa* it is described not in negative but

in positive terms. The term *Brahman* appears to be from a root meaning "to exert strength" or "to pray."[1] The area of human awareness from which this concept comes is apparently not that of the cosmos or of human personality but that of the transcending power of the prayer itself. As a result, "knowing" *Brahman* cannot be understood in terms of analogies from the knowing of objects or personalities. *Brahman* is known generally through an awareness of the transcending character of religious experience itself, and specifically through the insights which suggest that the secret of the universe is a truth identical with the deepest level of the Self.

In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* the relation between *Brahman* and the *Brahman*-knower is stated this way :

> People ask : "If men think that by *Brahman*-knowing they will become all reality, then what was it *Brahman* knew by which That One (He) became all reality ?"
>
> (Answer) "*Brahman* was in the beginning. It knew itself as 'I am *Brahman*' and therefore it became all reality. Whoever among the "Powers" became enlightened to That, he became That ; so also sages or "heroes" ; so also men, ...Whoever knows thus 'I am *Brahman*' he becomes all reality." 1. 4. 9 and 10a

The nature of salvation as conceived by the Upaniṣadic seers was not as dramatic as it was in the Buddhist context. It was not as dramatic because it was not a radical transformation of life, but a total release from life. Salvation in the Upaniṣads was "*mokṣa*" or "release" from the root *muc* meaning "to deliver." There was no "way" to follow but simply a "knowing" of the illusoriness of experienced reality in such a way as to be released from it. While the process was not dramatic, the result was described more positively than in the Buddhist texts. Salvation led to "*sat-chit-ananda*" or the state of full "being", "consciousness", and "bliss". This description had within it a sense of the fullness of that which is glimpsed behind the illusoriness of life and

1. J. Gonda, *Notes on Brahman*, (Utrecht, 1950) discusses the different possibilities.

a hint of that which is totally transcendent and new. In this sense, salvation was not so much a crossing over "there" as an acceptance of the "here" which at the same time transforms it into something totally new. Hence, the Upaniṣads provided the basis for a religious Tradition which is very much rooted in this world and, at the same time, very radical in its rejection of this world.

With the work of the Early Buddhist Sangha and the Upaniṣadic schools, the "theological basis" of the Indian Religious Tradition had been set forth. While borrowing from the mythological and ritual patterns of the earlier Indus and Ṛg Vedic Civilizations these Buddhist and Upaniṣadic teachers formulated a new theological system around which Indian Civilization was to develop. As prophets these Buddhist and Upaniṣadic seers saw once and for all the Truth which the Tradition was later to use as the basis for a structuring of the whole of life.

In formulating their clear prophetic message the Buddhist and Upaniṣadic theologians set in motion a dramatic new religious development which was not going to be easy for the Indian Civilization to assimilate. It would appear that at the time of the rise of the Mauryan Empire in the Fourth Century B. C. these two movements had produced only small esoteric communities. The message that the world was painful and illusory was profound but not easy to translate into social, or even intellectual and artistic forms. The next step in the development of the Tradition was to find a way of accepting this message while still facing up to the realities and responsibilities of life. When this was accomplished an intellectual defense of the system could be attempted and an artistic flowering could follow. While the working out of this prophetic vision in terms of such supporting cultural structures was taking place, the theological voice of the Tradition limited itself to a dogmatic reassertion of the message set forth by the "prophets". By the end of the Twelfth Century A. D., this development was to result in the *Consolidation* of the Tradition which in the Fourth Century B. C. had only received its initial *Formulation*

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PART III

CONSOLIDATION OF THE TRADITION

INTRODUCTION

In the period before the Third Century B. C. it would appear that the theology expressed in the Buddhist Sangha and the Upaniṣadic schools was accepted and followed by only a very small minority of the Indian population. By the time of the Muslim invasion twelve hundred years later, this theology had permeated the life of the Indian people to an extent rarely seen in any religious tradition.

The process by which relatively esoteric religious visions become the property of whole societies and express themselves in complex cultural forms is not very clearly understood. Poor historical records and the complexity of Indian history during the period under review make it even more difficult to understand this process in the Indian context. However, the leaders of the Indian Tradition, with a true instinct for the forms that sustained the Tradition, did prepare analyses of the various cultural forms that they considered important. As a result there are available from this period treatises on socio-political theory, philosophy and art, which taken together, represent the primary cultural forms in which Indian religious experience expressed itself The historian can analyse these treatises in the light of actual developments in political and social life, in philosophy, and in art, and through a composite picture of these three forms of religious expression can gain a fair understanding of the developments in the Tradition during this period.

When the treatises on socio-political theory, philosophy and art are analysed in the light of the history which can be reconstructed, the following pattern seems to emerge Beginning in the Third Century B. C., the leaders in the society began to seek a socio-political form which would provide a proper expression for the vision of the Early Buddhist Sangha and the Upaniṣadic schools. When the earlier vision had been reinterpreted in terms of the ideal of *dharma* and been widely accepted by the Indian people, the interest shifted to philosophy. By the beginning of the Christian era, the philosophers were seeking to reconcile the quest for salvation (*mokṣa*)

with the ideal of *dharma* while at the same time seeking a way to include the warm naturalism of the masses' piety in the central Tradition. Finally, when philosophy had established a synthesis of the various elements to be included in the Tradition, the artist became free, beginning in the Fourth Century A. D., to express the vital "heart" of the whole Tradition. It should be clear that these developments overlap one another, and, indeed, all three developments continue throughout the period, but there is a progression in the central concern from socio-political to philosophical and from philosophical to artistic.

The concern of the historian is not to judge these cultural forms of the Indian Tradition in the light of similar developments, which arose at different times and in relation to different needs, within other traditions. Comparative studies in sociology, philosophy and art are useful in understanding these expressions of human genius, but they cannot contribute directly to the understanding of the structure and coherence of the Indian Tradition. Neither should these expressions of religious experience be judged in terms of the simpler religious ideals which were found in the Upaniṣadic and Early Buddhist texts. The historical fact is that the religious vision of the earlier period did express itself in cultural forms, and this development, while complex and perhaps not always true to its prophetic origins, is a part of the Indian Religious Tradition.

In the present analysis this period is described as one of *Consolidation*, for it is during this period that the simpler message of the earlier period came to pervade the whole of Indian culture. The theological mood of the period was "dogmatic" in that it reaffirmed the message of its predecessors and turned away from unauthorized myths and rituals which represented new challenges to the Tradition. Nevertheless, this is a period of great vitality in the Tradition, and by the end of the period both the piety of individuals and the accomplishments of empires are consistent with the Tradition's underlying theological commitment to a degree rarely seen in any civilization.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIO-POLITICAL BASE

With the rise of the Mauryan Empire (322-185 B. C.) the socio-political history of India took a decisive new turn. The numerous petty kingdoms which covered the plains of Northern India at the time of the Buddha now gave way to a centralized empire covering all but the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. The outline which the conquest and administration of Chandragupta set forth was filled in by the social policy of his grandson Aśoka and of the succeeding regime of the Śungas (195-71 B. C.). Despite the variety of rulers and policies by which these two dynasties were led, together they provided the context in which the Indian Religious Tradition worked out its socio-political form and, in so doing, provided a way for ordinary men to participate in that Tradition.

Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Dynasty, was a conqueror and administrator of great repute. The obscurity of his background has caused considerable speculation and in particular has given rise to theories which surmise that he was inspired by his contemporary Alexander the Great,[1] or that he was in some way a follower of the ascetic authoritarian policies of the Indus Civilization.[2] The traditional association of the Kauṭilya-*Arthaśāstra* with his court no longer seems reliable,[3] and without that as a source too little is known of his specific policy to enable us to pinpoint the sources of his inspiration. It is, however, safe to argue that he represents one of the later stages in a general social and political transformation. This transformation was seen in its early stages in the prominence granted to Kṣatriyas and wandering ascetics known as Śramanas in the

1. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 50.
2. S. Piggott, *op. cit.*, p. 289.
3. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 79.

Upaniṣadic and Buddhist circles, and it seems to have continued in the rise to power of the Magadhan Kingdom and the Nanda Dynasty. These movements from their inception had a broadening effect and Chandragupta consolidated the broad new base with the establishment of his Empire.

If the accomplishment of Chandragupta is better known than his intentions, the opposite is true of his grandson Aśoka. After one notable conquest in Kalinga, Aśoka became a convert to Buddhism and retired to his court to design a society in accord with his new philosophy. His most enduring mark was his statement of a socio-political policy which he had engraved in rock throughout his empire. While clearly inspired by his own involvement with Buddhism, the *dharma* which he introduced as state policy was based on general principles such as tolerance, respect for life and concern for the proper ordering of the whole society.

> Thus speaks Aśoka, the beloved of the gods : For more than two and a half years I have been a lay disciple of the Buddha. During the first year I did not exert myself greatly. While before this time men did not mix with the gods, as the result of exertion they now do so. This bliss is attainable both by great men and also by small men through exertion......Mother and father are to be obeyed, as are superiors and teachers, living creatures are to be treated kindly ; truth is to be spoken ; and the virtues of *dharma* are to be proclaimed.[1]

Aśoka consciously attempted to translate the esoteric message of the Buddhist Sangha into broad public policy. In doing so, though at times he struck a note which was almost naively moralistic, he became a symbol of the major concern of this whole period of Indian history as it strove to find a social and political base that would give substance to the Upaniṣadic and Buddhist message.

When the Mauryan Dynasty was replaced by the Śunga in 185 B.C., the most notable change was that the rulers

1. Translation of selections of the Sanskrit rendering of Minor Rock Edict II as found in R. Basak, *Aśokan Inscriptions*, (Calcutta, 1959).

looked not to the Buddhist Sangha, but to the more orthodox branches of the Tradition for their religious foundations. What exactly this meant in those days it is not possible to say. It is clear that the Śunga empire was smaller and probably less authoritarian that the Mauryan, that during their rule the "popular" art of Sāñchi and Bhārhut began to flourish, and that sometime during this period an orthodox social system was formulated. It would appear that as the energy needed in the creation of the Mauryan Empire and the establishment of a political base for the Tradition spent itself, the political order relaxed and the society set about working out a social structure which would express its underlying religious spirit.

The concept which the Indian Religious Tradition developed to give socio-political expression to its religious vision was the concept of *dharma* The religious ideals which were accepted in the earlier period had already given some indication of the kind of socio-political structure which would be established. If the universe was understood as a great cosmic round known as *samsāra* there could be little meaning in the petty triumphs of tribal chiefs. If man was a product of the law of *karma* struggling for his release from *samsāra*, his rulers were not likely to pose as divine representatives on earth. And if men were to individually seek an awareness of their identity with the one all-embracing Reality, they would have to understand their socio-political responsibility not in terms of general principles but in terms of concrete duties which were related to their progress on the way to release or *mokṣa*. These three requirements of the socio-political order meant that it would have to be *universal* (in theory at least) to reflect the dimensions of *samsāra*; that it would have to be *this-worldly* in that it was an arrangement of the profane affairs of man and not a pale reflection of a spiritual ideal; and it would have to be consistent with a *mystical* view of man as being primarily a spiritual and only secondarily a social being. The concept of *dharma*

can be fully understood only when seen in the light of these three requirements it was designed to fulfill.[1]

The grandeur of the conception of *dharma* as a total cosmic order is made explicit in the *Dharmaśastra* of Manu, the standard socio-political treatise which is usually dated in the late pre-Christian era. In the language of a mythic conception of creation, Manu views the whole cosmos as a temporary ordering of chaos which goes through a series of increasingly disordered stages until a new creation takes place. Within this conception the most notable patterns prescribed for human life during the present age are the systems of *āśrama* and *varṇa*. Each man should proceed through the four stages or *āśramas* of a student, a householder, a forest dweller and a saint In addition, men are divided into the four classes or *varṇas* of the Brāhmaṇ or scholar-priest, the Kṣatriya or ruler, the Vaiśya or trader and the Śūdra or menial worker.

> This world was enveloped in darkness...as if in sleep. The Self-Existent Blessed One while unmanifest made it manifest. One set of *dharmas* is prescribed for men in the Kṛta Age, other sets of *dharmas* in the Tretā and the Dvāpara ages and still another set of *dharmas* in the Kali age, in accordance with the increasing deterioration characterizing each successive age.
>
> *　　*　　*　　*
>
> For the sake of the preservation of this entire creation the Exceeding Resplendent One assigned separate duties to the classes which had sprung from his mouth, arms, thighs and feet.

1. The great work of Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, (New York, 1958) has usually been quoted in relation to his contention that Indian religion contained no rational this-worldly ethic. He did, however, recognize the practical this-worldly quality of the ideal Indian social system. His failure seems to have been that in stating his case negatively he did not see clearly enough the intimate relation between theological goal and social ideal in the Indian Tradition.

Teaching, studying, performing sacrificial rites, so too making others perform sacrificial rites, and giving away and receiving gifts—these are assigned to the Brāhmans.

Protection of the people, giving away of wealth, performance of sacrificial rites, study and nonattachment to sensual pleasures—these are, in short, the duties of a Kṣatriya.

Tending of cattle, giving away of wealth, performance of sacrificial rites, study, trade and commerce, usury and agriculture—these are the occupations of a Vaiśya.

Only one occupation is prescribed for a Śūdra, namely, service without malice of even these other three classes.

Manava Dharmaśāstra, Section 1[1]

The implications of this conception of the social order as an expression of cosmic order are very important.[2] The tribal society of the Ṛg Vedic period had been set aside and with it, in theory at least, were set aside the tradition of constant warring and of charismatic heroic leadership. In practice both the warring and charismatic leadership reappeared in times of imperial weakness, but neither were any longer part of the socio-political ideal. The two characteristics of the social order that this new ideal fostered were universalism and hierarchicalism. The system was universal not because it was based on some idea of a natural order or some equalitarian ethic revealed by the divine. It was universal in that all beings shared in the system in some measure. Thus the attitude of the Tradition towards the "outsider" was different from that found in Greece or China where the term "barbarian" was relevant or in the Semitic religious context where the term "pagan" was relevant. For the Indian all men were potentially part of the system and, while newcomers would almost certainly be given a lowly

1. Translation of selected passages.
2. For a general treatment of Indian social ideals see P. N. Prabhu *Hindu Social Organization*, (Bombay, 1940).

place, they could be "Sanskritized"[1] by the prescribing of some set of *dharma* rules for them.

In addition to being universal the society developed by the Indian Tradition was hierarchical. This meant that society was not the product of the will of men either in the modern sense where it is a voluntary association of people, or in the Semitic sense where it was an expression of obedience to the law of God. In this hierarchical conception there were no concepts such as "humanity", "universal brotherhood", or "universal love". There were only associations of specific groups of people which fulfilled functions not so much in relation to one another, but in relation to a cosmic order. The Brāhman in this system did not really rule over the lower orders as he would in a strict class system. He, like the others, fulfilled the functions the order gave him even though his economic or political power might have been less than that of other members in the society. This hierarchy among men served to establish the priorities of the social order : the preservation of the Tradition first, the defence of the society second, economic vitality third, and manual service fourth. But the hierarchy also established the stages on the way to salvation so that members of lower castes could, through the process of transmigration, hope to be reborn at successively higher levels until they received release from the system altogether.

The second major requirement of the socio-political order was that it should be "this-worldly".[2] It should be operated according to the laws for the manipulation of power, and it should not be identified with religious purposes or become a pale reflection of a heavenly ideal. The political order was to be "secular" not in the ambiguous modern sense that it would be committed to an a-religious ideology and thus shun

1. This term has recently been developed to explain the modern assimilation process but is equally relevant throughout Indian history. M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*, (London, 1965).

2. For a general guide to Indian political ideals see A. S. Altekar *State and Government in Ancient India*, (Varanasi, 1962).

established religious bodies, but in that it would avoid all religious and ideological purposing and limit its activities to the maintainance of the order of society.[1] In the pursuit of power and the defence of the society it was right and proper to spy, deceive, make alliances and use military might. On the other hand, it was inconceivable that this power could be used for ideological conquests. Consistent with this principle, the history of the Indian Empires has not been expansionist.

The advantage of this arrangement to the Religious Tradition was that its fortunes were not affected by the continual change in the social and political order. In contrast to Judaism and Islam where God was committed to the history of his people and was in danger of defeat, and in contrast to China where the Emperor was the personal head of the Confucian hierarchy and subject to revolutionary change in bad times, the Brāhmans functioned only as personal advisors to the independent Ksatriya rulers who won or lost according to the principles of the proper use of power. On the other hand, the political order could be used to promote a unified view of life as defined by the Tradition. In practice this meant that with their political responsibilities fulfilled, rulers frequently devoted their wealth and energy to the arrangement of rituals and the sponsoring of art and philosophy. The *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya which is known for its Machiavellian suggestions about the use of power, states the relation of politics to the rest of the tradition very clearly :

> Philosophy, the Veda, the science of economics, and the science of polity—these are the sciences...
>
> Sānkhya, Yoga and Materialism—these constitute philosophy. Distinguishing, with proper reasoning, between good and evil in the Vedic religion, between profit and nonprofit in the science of economics, and between right

1. The recent study on the modern Indian political state by D. Smith, *India as a Secular State*, (Princeton, 1963) seems to miss this "Indian" meaning of secular.

> policy and wrong policy in the science of polity, and determining the comparative validity and invalidity of these sciences, philosophy becomes helpful to the people, keeps the mind steady in woe and weal, and produces adroitness of understanding, speech and action...
>
> ...The way of life taught in the Vedas is helpful on account of its having laid down the duties of the four classes and the four stages of life...
>
> ...Through the knowledge of economics, a king brings under his control his own party and the enemy's party with the help of treasury and army.
>
> The sceptre is the means of the acquisition and preservation of philosophy, the Veda, and economics. The science treating with the effective bearing of the sceptre is the science of polity (*Daṇḍa Nīti*). It conduces to the acquisition of what is not acquired, the preservation of what has been acquired, the growth of what has been preserved, and the distribution among worthy people of what has grown. It is on it that the proper functioning of society depends...
>
> Kautilya *Arthaśāstra*, 1. 2, 3, 4, 7[1]

The third requirement of the socio-political order was that it should be such as defined the duties of the individual as a first step in his quest for salvation. The individual as defined by the Tradition was not so much a social animal as a spiritual being, a part of the Eternal *Ātman*. The new system of *dharma* defined extensive this-worldly social and political responsibilities which individuals were obliged to fulfil, but they were so defined as to contribute to his overall quest for salvation. The *Bhagavad Gītā* was one of the more important texts which addressed itself to this aspect of the problem.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is probably one of the later additions to the library of the Tradition known as the *Mahābhārata*. In older sections of the *Mahābhārata dharma* sometimes appeared as a rigid heavenly law not unlike the Ṛg Vedic

1. Selections from translation edited by J. Jolly and R. Schmidt, 2 vols, (Lahore, 1923-24).

ṛta, and sometimes as a lost dream of social justice that the heroes hoped somehow to revive as they fought the forces of evil. However, by the time of the *Gītā* Arjuna was not asked to establish the order of *dharma* for it already pervaded life. His problem was his *svadharma* or his personal *dharma* which meant the proper performance of his warrior duties as a Kṣatrīya. The doing of this *Svadharma* constituted his ritual acceptance of the Tradition. The concern of the *Gītā* was with the translation of this *dharma* activity into the full religious experience of the Tradition, which was still seen in terms of the visionary identification with the Ultimate as originally set forth in the Upaniṣads. In bringing these issues together the *Gītā* reconciled the this-worldly realism on which the system of *dharma* was established, and the mystical identification of the individual with the Supreme *Ātman* to which the Tradition was committed as its highest goal.

"O Arjuna, whence is this your despair in the hour of crisis ? This is not worthy of a nobleman, it does not lead to heaven, and it causes disgrace.

O Son of Pṛthā, yield not to this cowardice, for it does not become thee. Turn away from this base weak-heartedness and arise, O Scorcher of the Foe.

* * *

Even considering the matter from the point of view of your own duty (*svadharma*) you ought not to tremble, for there exists nothing better for a Kṣatriya than a fight born of duty (*dharma*).

* * *

The wise, who with disciplined minds turn away from the fruits of action, are freed from the bondage of rebirth and go to the place which is beyond sorrow.

* * *

The man, who abandons all desires, who lives free from longing, and who is without self interest and a sense of separate selfhood (ego-ness); that man goes to the state of peace.[1]

1. Translation of selected verses in *Bhagavad Gītā*, Chapter Two.

This reconciliation of the "this worldly" and the "mystical" was not always clearly understood in the course of the history of the Tradition, but the great popularity of the *Gītā* in all ages testifies to the fact that it was recognized as containing the formula which allowed a man living in this world to participate in the quest for Ultimate Identity.

The development of the concept of *dharma* was a radical and daring move on the part of the Tradition. The ritual life of the small esoteric Buddhist and Upaniṣadic communities—of which very little is said in their texts—was probably a combination of older Ṛg Vedic practices and spontaneous new activities growing out of the new religious experience. When under the inspiration of Aśoka it was decided to abandon these esoteric communities and expand the Religious Tradition to embrace the entire society, a totally new conception of the relation of religious vision and ritual activity had to be developed. Doubtless the details of the social and political orders which the term *dharma* sanctified were developing under a variety of historical pressures, but the fact that the Religious Tradition dared to try to harness them is in itself important.

The formulas outlined by Manu and Kauṭilya continued to be echoed by the socio-political theorists of subsequent centuries, but by the beginning of the Christian era even the partial fulfilment of their ideals had brought new problems to the Tradition. The formulation of realistic this-worldly concerns made it important to define more clearly the relation between those concerns and the goal of salvation ; the inclusion in the Tradition of the religious life of people with heritages other than those of the esoteric Buddhist and Upaniṣadic communities made it essential that the nature of the religious authority be more clearly defined ; and the masses of people accepted into the Tradition made it necessary that a more devotional religious practice be developed. All of these problems were left for the philosophers who found themselves responsible for the arranging of the various elements in this newly broadened Religious Tradition.

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CHAPTER SIX

PHILOSOPHICAL STRUCTURE

It has often been said that in ancient India philosophy and religion were one and the same. This is not true. Indian philosophy obediently accepted its position within the overall Indian Religious Tradition, as did socio-political theory and art. Though one might define Indian philosophy in such broad terms as to make it equivalent with the whole Religious Tradition or the Vedic authority by which the Tradition is sustained, this is not the way the term has traditionally been defined in India. The Indian term under discussion in this chapter is the term *darśana*.[1] *Darśana* comes from a root meaning "to see" and is to be understood as "a view" of the nature of reality. It was always assumed that there would be a number of "*darśanas*" and that in some sense they would be complimentary structures through which the Ultimate could be viewed.

The role of the *darśanas* within the Religious Tradition as a whole was one of consolidating, structuring and synthesizing. Expressed in terms of imagery, philosophy served as a scaffolding which on the one hand supported the Tradition and gave it some of its soaring grandeur, but on the other hand tended to obscure the outside observer's view of the heart of the Tradition. This relatively limited role assigned to philosophy by the Indian Religious Tradition was important throughout the history of the Tradition, but was of central importance in the centuries after the beginning of the Christian era.

The result of the establishment of the Religious Tradition in the socio-political order described in the previous chapter

1. This term is discussed in the most complete work on Indian philosophy; S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, (Cambridge, England, 1957), p. 68.

was that the central Religious Tradition was flooded with a host of different native traditions. An indication of the spirit of some of these native traditions is well expressed in the rich love of nature and fertility that emerges in the reliefs that decorate the gateways of the Buddhist stupa at Sāñchi.[1] These native traditions were to prove a source of rich vitality and renewal to the central stream, but only as they were able to be incorporated into the authoritative Tradition established in the name of Veda. However, the issue was not as simple as the reconciling of popular ritual and high-minded theology, for the philosopher had also to find a way of bringing the meaning of the social order as expressed in the concept of *dharma* into harmony with each of the other two elements. In an oversimplified form, it is sometimes said that the Indian philosopher established alternative paths to salvation : the paths of *jñāna* (knowledge), of *karma* (action), and of *bhakti* (devotion).[2] To the Indian philosopher in the early centuries of the Christian era the relation of these different aspects of the Tradition appeared infinitely more complex. First he had to establish the clear authority of the Vedic tradition. After consolidating the Tradition he then had to find a structural relationship which would facilitate both the maintainance of *dharma* and the quest for *mokṣa* or salvation. And, finally, within this consolidated structure he had to allow for the natural warmth and vitality of the native Indian religious spirit.

A major contribution to the philosopher's task came from the Buddhists. The earlier Buddhist philosophers had tried to expound the meaning of a world of flux, but Nāgārjuna who lived in the Second Century A. D. initiated a completely new approach to philosophy.[3] Nāgārjuna applied a

1. See Chapters One and Seven.

2. See S Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, 2 vols., (London, 1923), Chapter IX.

3. Among the many works on Nāgārjuna mention should be made of: Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, (The Hague, 1965 ; reprint from 1927); T. R. V Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, (London, 1955), V. K. Ramanan, *Nāgārjuna's Philosophy as presented in the Mahā-Prajñāpāramitā-Śāstra*, (Tokyo, 1966); F. J. Streng, *Emptiness*, (Nashville, 1967)

critical dialectic to reason itself, thereby demonstrating the limits of reason. Having by reason demonstrated the relativity of all things, he moved from their voidness to the awareness of the sole reality as the Void or the *Śūnya*. Having attained the awareness of *Śūnya* one realizes the ultimate identity of *Nirvāṇa* (the state of bliss) and of *Samsāra* (the sea of sense impressions).

> If all this is Void (*Śūnya*) and there is no coming to be and no ceasing to be, then of what nature are the release and cessation through which *Nirvāṇa* is sought ? ...If *Nirvāṇa* were a state of Being it ought to have the mark of decay and death for there is no Being without decay and death...If *Nirvāṇa* is Non-Being then how could *Nirvāṇa* be independent for there is no Non-Being which is independent...(It must be) that *Samsāra* is not different from *Nirvāṇa* nor is *Nirvāṇa* different from *Samsāra* ..What then is "identity" and what is "difference" ; what is "eternity" and what is "non-eternity" ; or what is both "eternity" and "non-eternity" ; and what is not either of these ? That which is auspicious is a cessation of perceiving and a cessation of all plurality, for nowhere and at no time did the Buddha teach (the doctrine of) separate momentary realities (*dharmas*).[1 2]

To some of his followers Nāgārjuna's essentially negative solution did not go far enough, for while he had demonstrated the relativity of the sensory world, he had not recognized the reality of the consciousness which had provided the basis for the demonstration. These followers took the name Vijñānavādins to indicate that they were believers in consciousness (*vijñāna*) as the sole reality, and the more loyal followers of Nāgārjuna took the name Śūnyavādins or believers in the Void.[3]

1. A rival Buddhist position.
2. Translation of selected verses from Chapter 25 of Nāgārjuna's *Mādhyamika Śāstra*.
3. The Śūnyavādins were also called followers of the Mādhyamika or "middle way."

The philosophical work of the Buddhists in the period provided the structure in which the developments usually called Mahāyāna Buddhism could take place. The original message of the Buddha had combined the soaring idealism of the quest for Nirvāṇa with the penetrating realism which saw all of life as suffering. The monks who established themselves in Ceylon by the early centuries of the Christian era chose the realistic side and worked out a system of ascetic practices through which they could live with the world of *duḥkha.* Stated in terms of the more orthodox Indian tradition they established a system of *dharma* which had only a minimal interest in *mokṣa* or salvation. However, in much of the Buddhist Sangha the supreme importance of the ascetic way was not to be accepted and *Nirvāṇa* was understood as a transforming salvation made possible by the mythological Presence of the Buddha and the compassionate activity of the Bodhisattvas.[1] The Śūnyavādin and Vijñānavādin philosophical schools supported this religious structure by establishing the centrality of the dimension of *mokṣa,* and by allowing for the affirmation of a non-sensory mythological world in relation to which the spirit of man could express the vitality and aspiration that filled his consciousness.

While Buddhist philosophers gave their primary attention to the establishment of the dimension of salvation, their orthodox counterparts worked more on the problems of the authority of Tradition and the place of the ritual devotion which leads to salvation. The earlier Sāṇkhya had puzzled over the question of the relation between the Ultimate and the Plurality that men experience. They had decided on a dualism in which each of these elements was autonomous and in which salvation consisted of freeing the *Puruṣa* (spirit) from the evolving *Prakṛti* (nature) which had been stimulated into activity by a lack of discriminating knowledge.

1. The Trikaya or "Three Bodies" doctrine was developed to account for · (1) the Buddha who had taken historical form (*Nirmāṇakāya*) (2) the Buddha in his compassionate saving activity (*Sambhogakāya*); and (3) the Buddha in his Ultimate Presence (*Dharmakāya*)

> From the affliction with three varieties of pain (*duḥkha*) arises the desire to know the means of removing it... The best way (to the removal of the pain) is a discriminating knowledge of the Manifest (forms of matter), the Unmanifest (*Prakṛti* that lies behind these forms), and the Knower (*puruṣa*) .. ..It was that the *puruṣa* might be able to contemplate *Prakṛti* and to become entirely separate from it, that the union of the two was made, as of the lame and the blind, and through that union the universe was formed .....Having obtained a separation from the body, *Prakṛti* no longer having any necessity to act, the *puruṣa* attains a release (*kaivalyam*) which is certain and final.[1]

The very similar Yoga system made this understanding religiously meaningful by accepting a supreme *Puruṣa* which would work for this saving freedom and by outlining a pattern of discipline by which the movement in *Prakṛti* could be overcome and the difference between Nature and Spirit be discerned. With the Vaiśeṣika system the strict dualism disappeared and was replaced by an atomistic Nature ruled by a theistic Lord. In these developments the philosophical schools made possible the synthesis which was to characterize the subsequent Tradition in which the unknowable Absolute of the Upaniṣads was combined with the Realistic Pluralism implicit in the warm devotionalism and Yoga discipline of popular religion.

The way in which this particular treatment of the "one-many" problem is expressed in a religious text is seen very clearly in the most important religious work of this period, the *Bhagavad Gītā*.[2] The obvious concern of the *Gītā* is, like that of the *Mahābhārata* of which it is a part, with the maintainance of *dharma*. However, in contrast to the rest of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Gītā* is only initially concerned with the maintainance of *dharma*. Having established the structure of the relationship *dharma-mokṣa*, it goes on to work out

1. Translation of selected verses from Īśvara Kṛṣṇa's *Sāmkhya Kārikā*.
2. See also Chapter Five.

the relationship between the Ultimate toward which one moves, and the practice of devotion to the Lord through which one seeks salvation.

> I am the origin of all for all this (creation) came forth from me. Knowing this the enlightened who are filled with this awareness worship Me. Those whose thoughts are on Me, whose lives are given over to Me, who enlighten one another by constantly talking about Me, they are content and happy. To those who are constantly disciplined and who worship Me lovingly, I give the discipline of mind by which they can come unto Me. Out of compassion for those same ones I cause to be dispelled the darkness born of ignorance with the shining of the light of knowledge ; even while I remain in my own true state.[1]

The *Gītā* reflects a relatively late stage in the development of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa devotional piety. The literary evidence for the history of this sectarian movement is very thin in spite of the attempt to give the movement Vedic authority by associating it with the Vedic god Viṣṇu. Its background appears to be the richly varied cultic life which is reflected in the art of the period and which is echoed in the popular literature. Add to this the evidence of some inscriptions and images of the early Christian centuries and there emerges a picture of theistic worship embellished by rich mythological tradition.[2] Out of this tradition the Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā* emerges as a figure of great mystery and awe, the Lord of Creation, the upholder of *dharma*, and the source of salvation. Doubtless the awesomeness and the saving grace were themes familiar to the members of the cultic community. What was creative in the *Gītā* was the way in which this warm devotional realism was combined with the Upaniṣadic vision of the Ultimate principle behind

1. Translation of *Bhagavad Gītā* 10: 8–11.
2. The best general source for this history is R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Minor Religious Systems*, (Strassburg, 1913).

creation, and with the Tradition's recently formulated concern with *dharma*.

This formulation of the theological issues is an interesting modification of the Buddha's earlier visionary message. The Buddha had intuitively grasped the balance between the realistic acceptance of the pain of this life and the idealistic reach for the salvation which lay beyond. But in his sharp juxtaposing of these two conceptions he had made it almost necessary for his followers to choose between them. While the Southern Buddhists chose an ascetic path which skirted around the jungles of human understanding, the Northern Buddhists elevated the mythology to the heavenly realm with only a marginal encounter with the life of man. On the other hand, in establishing the concept of *dharma* the Orthodox branch of the Tradition asserted the reality and importance of this life even while denying its finality. With this position established, the rich complexity of earthly life was allowed into the system as a mythological description of human nature in terms of a cosmic whole. In practice the ritual manifestations of this mythology might often appear to deteriorate into magical manipulations of the temporal order. But the literary tradition by which they were maintained never lost the *Gītā's* combination of this mythological warmth with the preservation of *dharma* and with the quest for the true knowledge of the Ultimate.

With this synthesis established, the danger that the Tradition might loose its direction was very great. The Tradition had accepted the devotional cults on terms of their own choosing, and had no longer sure control over the direction of development within the Religious Tradition as a whole. The philosopher's job would be complete only if he could reassert the authority of the Tradition in a more forceful way. In the latter part of the period under discussion this was done by a reassertion of the authority of the Veda. An earlier attempt by the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā school to make this assertion had depended on the naively realistic position that the very syllables of the scriptures themselves contained inherent

power. Another attempt to assert the authority of the Tradition in quite a different way was made in the Uttara or Later Mīmāṁsā of Śaṅkara at the beginning of the Ninth Century.[1]

By Śaṅkara's time the cult associated with Śiva had become even more prominent in parts of India than that associated with Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa.[2] This cult had no clear connections with the Vedic tradition, and yet it had a cosmology so clear and a devotion so demanding that the devotees had no obvious need either for Vedic knowledge or for *dharma* behavior. There might have been a problem of loyalties for the Śaivite, but Śaṅkara who was a noted hymn-writer and devotee of Śiva was also a Vedic scholar and a severely systematic person. His formulation started with the position that the Vedic truth alone was real. While this meant that epistemologically *Śruti* or the authority of the *Veda* was the only true source of knowledge, it meant in practice not that the words of the *Veda* carried authority, but that the truth of which the *Veda* spoke, the *Brahman*, alone was real. The implication was that the world in which men live was something less than real, indeed was *māyā* or illusory appearance. To him the mythology, and hence the devotion, was fine but it must be clearly understood that it was but a second level of truth, a level which was important in the life of the masses but which at best only prepared the ground for true knowledge.

> The comprehension of *Brahman* is to be derived from the scriptures of the Vedānta (Upaniṣads), not from inference or the other means of knowledge......*Brahman* is known in two forms : first as qualified by the limits of the many names and forms of the created world; the second as free from all limits......*Brahman* possesses a double nature depending on whether it is apprehended through knowledge (*vidya*) or ignorance (*avidya*). As the

1. Śaṅkara is included in this chapter, even though his dates are later, because his interests fall in this context.
2. See Bhandarkar, *op. cit.*

object of *avidya* it has the character of an object of devotion to the devotee. The different kinds of devotion lead to different results ; such as joy, gradual release or success in works, depending on the type and quality of the devotion ; even though there is only the one highest *Ātman*.[1]

Śaṅkara's contribution had a very important effect on the development of the Religious Tradition in India. The synthesis worked out in the *Gītā* had made concessions to the devotional spirit of man which no doubt obscured the Upaniṣadic direction laid down for the Tradition. It held the devotional warmth of the cult within the Tradition largely through its appeal to the universally accepted pattern of *dharma* through which the Upaniṣadic goals were popularly expressed. Śaṅkara reversed this balance in favor of a reassertion of the Tradition and of the primary goal of knowing *Brahman*. In establishing the primacy of knowing *Brahman* he was following the lead of Nāgārjuna and the Māhāyana Buddhist philosophers who had asserted the primacy of the dimension of *mokṣa* While this assertion of the primacy of *mokṣa* did not conceptually deny the relevance of *dharma*, it in fact had that effect. The post-Śāṅkara Religious Tradition lost not only some of its mythological warmth, but also much of the clear realism that had given rise to a strong socio-political order in the earlier periods.

The impact of the "philosophers" on the Indian Religious Tradition in the early centuries of the Christian era was a mixed blessing. The Buddhist philosophers early in the period rescued the Tradition from becoming a this-worldly system of ascetic *dharma* and restored the dimension of of salvation or *mokṣa*. The Orthodox philosophers found a way of incorporating the warm naturalistic devotion of the cults into the quest for salvation. And Sāṅkara established the authority of the Tradition which kept it from deteriorating into popular myth and ritual and enabled it to survive the challenge that future history was to bring. At the same

1. Translation of selections from *Brahmasūtra–Śaṅkara-Bhāshyam*.

time, the philosophical impact on the Tradition tended to weaken the realistic concern with the doing of *dharma* and inhibited the devotional spirit in a way that it refused to accept. This devotional spirit was to find its full expression in the arts which dominated the next period of the Tradition, but the crisis in *dharma* was delayed until the Muslim invasions of the subsequent period.

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CHAPTER SEVEN
ARTISTIC CENTER

With the establishment of the Gupta Empire in North India in the Fourth Century A. D. India is said to have entered into its Golden Age. From the point of view of artistic production, this Golden Age was to continue until the coming of the Muslim conquerors at the end of the Twelfth Century. While literature and sculpture reached their zenith during the Gupta Period, music and architecture were to receive their finest expressions toward the close of this period. From the point of view of the history of the Indian Religious Tradition, this flourishing of the art forms marks the period of confident maturity. Having been able to establish its broad socio-political base and having been given a synthetic structure by the philosophers, the Tradition then expressed its inner spirit in mature art forms, a peaceful extension of its influence over all corners of the Indian subcontinent, and a cultural overflow to much of Southeast Asia.

An early native tradition in art would seem to have been discovered in the sculpture of the Indus Civilization and the reliefs of the Śunga period found on the gateways of stupas at Bhārhut and Sāñchi. While separated by more than two thousand years, these two sites show the same joyous love of the rhythms of nature and the vitality of the twisting movement of Becoming.[1] Complementing this native tradition was the artistic experience of cultures west of India which was heavily relied on for the techniques used by the artists of the Mauryan court and the Gāndhāra school of the Kuṣāna court.[2] In these two instances, Buddhist rulers chose to seek from outside a complement to the naturalistic native tradition,

1. See Chapters One and Three.
2. The best general history of Indian art is B. Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India : Buddhist, Hindu, Jain,* (Baltimore, 1953).

but in both cases the innovations were shortlived and the Buddhist artists themselves went back to the more expressive native tradition.

The first major accomplishment of the Indian artists in the service of the central Religious Tradition was the development of the Buddha image. Once the veneration of the Buddha had won a place within the Religious Tradition there was a clear need for an artistic expression of the understanding of the Buddha. Artistically this development was facilitated by the precedent of the heavy earth-bound Yakṣa figures and by the Græco-Roman images known to the artists of Gāndhāra.[1] But the Buddha image as it emerged in the Gupta period was a creative new expression of the serenity and compassion of the Enlightened One (Plate 11). The body of the Buddha, so carefully described, and presented with a warm and gentle texture, was a perfect idealization of man in the world of suffering. At the same time, the image was set forth with the characteristic marks of divinity and with the aura of serenity and silence which was the perfect representation of Enlightenment. This image appears to have reached its highest artistic form in the Gupta period and was thereafter copied in increasingly rigid versions of the necessary iconography. The Tantric Buddhist art of the Pāla Period (760-1142 A. D.) and later of Nepal and Kashmir represented the exclusive triumph of the devotional element in the Tradition (Plate 12). In these Tantric figures neither the warm humanity, nor the sense of the unknowable Ultimate beyond the experience of bliss are as evident as they were in earlier Buddha images. This change in the Buddha image is symbolic of the downgrading of *dharma* and *Veda* in Tantric Buddhism and the general alienation of this form of Buddhism from the Indian Religious Tradition.[2]

1. The origins of the Buddha image and the relative priority of the image in Gāndhāra and Mathura have created considerable controversy, but these controversies do not affect our argument here.
2. Many of the images of Tantric Buddhist art have only recently been found and have not yet been thoroughly studied. For a general treatment of Tantrism see A. Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, (London, 1965).

PLATE 12 : Buddha of the Pāla Period

PLATE 13 · Viṣṇu from post-Gupta Temple Niche

PLATE 14 : Three faces of Śiva from Elephanta
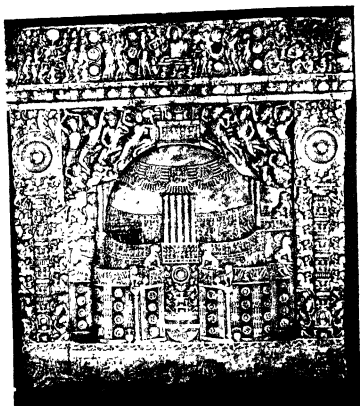
PLATE 15 : Amarāvati Relief

While the development of the Buddha image represented the most creative moment in Indian sculpture, that image did not take full advantage of the warm vitality of the native art tradition. A more synthetic art form was represented in the sculpture associated with the Orthodox cults in Central and Western India during the subsequent period. In these cultic images the central figure was modelled in the same tradition as the Buddha, and the earliest Viṣṇu images could be mistaken for Buddha images if it were not for the decorative headdresses, ornaments and other clear iconographic signs. But the setting in which these images appeared was the rich naturalistic world of movement and vitality which at this time was often employed to describe a mythological narrative in which the activity of the god was expressed. One of the better known scenes found in the dark recessed niches of the Central Indian temples represents the elaborate cosmogonic myth in which the serpent provided the background on which Viṣṇu the Creator reclined (Plate 13). Here the god emerges out of a rich naturalistic order, and is seen against that background as a preserver of order.[1] In this setting of dynamic action the silence, serenity and grace of the Buddha gradually gave way to heavier images signifying action, power and mythic heroism.[2] Probably the high point in this tradition was reached in the Śiva images in the caves at Elephanta near Bombay (Plate 14). There against the back wall of a semi-lit cave the massive Trimūrti or three faces of Śiva were carved. In the setting they barely emerge from the rock and the god in his mysteriousness appears before men only in the dramatic action of his līlā (sport) as the Great God, the Destroyer God and the God of grace. Here the richness of the cultic mythology

1. In a similar way at Ajānta the Bodhisattvas of Māhāyana Buddhism were set in their own mythic background side by side with the gods of the Orthodox cults.

2. The structure of these images is analyzed in an interesting way in A. Boner, *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture*, (Leiden, 1962). An interpretation of their mythology is found in H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, (New York, 1946).

was expressed in all its fullness, but it was integrated with the life of the whole Tradition in a maturity of spirit which included in its warmth the necessity of the ordered *dharma* and the final unreality of all but the Brahman.

A third pattern of development in sculpture emerged in South India with the creation of the bronze images of the Natarāja or Dancing Śiva. South Indian sculpture had always been characterized by a restless movement. The earlier reliefs at Amarāvatī (Plate 15), an extension of the Śunga style, had the same *naturalistic representation of* Becoming, but in the setting of Amarāvatī the figures of a restless cosmopolitan society were more prominent than the animals and vines of Sāñchi and Bhārhut. At a later date this naturalism was expressed in a more peaceful note in the great "Descent of the Ganges" sculpture on the face of a cliff at Mahābalipuram (Plate 16) Here the mythology was the story of an ascetic deep in meditation appealing to Śiva to bring down the waters, as the whole of nature gathered around. The struggle and the energy that characterized the Central Indian myths was no longer present, for here an ordered, naturally vital nature just blossomed forth from the rock. This natural rhythm of nature was finally expressed in its clear religious meaning in the Dancing Śiva (Plate 17). In creating the Dancing Śiva naturalistic description was set aside and the mythic narrative was set forth in a pure iconographic diagram. The restless movement of nature was now controlled in a cosmic cycle of creation, destruction and gracious recreation. The devotee no longer meditated with the Buddha, or exerted his energy by identifying with a struggling Viṣṇu, but he waited passively and received the gracious movement of the Lord. The myth was no longer a this-worldly story that gave content to the cultic activity, but a vivid symbolic account of the sole reality of the Lord who was truly *Brahman.*[1]

While sculpture expressed the warmth to be found at the heart of the cultic life of the Indian Religious Tradition,

1. For a discussion of Śaivite theology see Chapter Eight.

PLATE 16 : "Descent of the Ganges" Relief from Mahabalipuram

PLATE 17 : Bronze "Dancing Śiva"
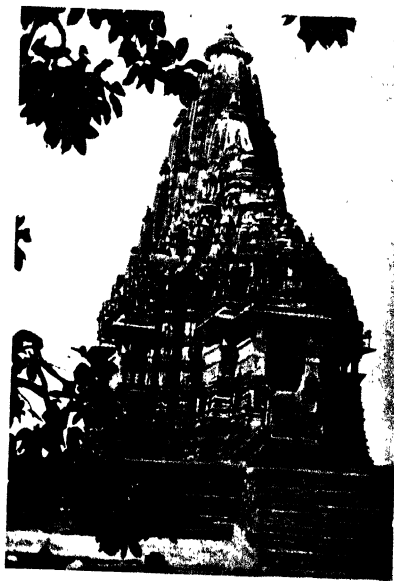
PLATE 18 : Khujarāho (North Indian) Temple

PLATE 19 Tanjore (South Indian) Temple

architecture expressed the rich variety of the Tradition. The temple was made up of three essential elements. One was the *garbha gṛha* or womb of Reality capped by a towering *śikhara* which represented the soaring quest for the inexpressible Truth. A second was the meeting room placed in front of the *garbha gṛha* which provided a place for worship and instruction and in general for a recognition of the role of *dharma* in preparation for entrance into the higher truth. The third part of the temple was the porch and walkway around the structure which provided the opportunity for the worshipper to perform a cultic act and participate in the rich mythology set forth on the sculptured walls. Taken as a whole, these three parts of the temple comprised an artistic formulation of the mature balance of the Religious Tradition. In some temples there was an emphasis on one or another of these parts at the expense of the others, in some the parts were awkwardly set together, while in others they were carefully blended into a rich harmony. In the North Indian temples (Plate 18) the soaring vertical lines of the *śikharas* were usually dominant and the separate parts of the temple were quite clearly distinguished. In the South Indian temples (Plate 19) there was a much heavier quality as the cylindrical roof was raised on successive tiers of sculpture giving a generally horizontal effect in spite of their great height. The sculptured figures of the South Indian temple covered practically the entire exterior and stood out from the structure in such a way as to convey the impression that all of nature was filled with vitality and life. The effect of these differences was to give a warmer and more earthy spirit to the South Indian temple and to minimize the struggle for the Beyond evoked by the mythological narratives in the recessed niches of the North Indian temples.

The period from the beginning of the Gupta Empire to the time of the Muslim invasions is an important one in the history of the Indian Religious Tradition. It has not received much attention from students of religion because in terms of religious thought it produced little except the lonely

figure of Śaṅkara, who really dealt primarily with the philosophical issues of an earlier age.[1] This period is usually spoken of as one of "decline,"[2] because it witnessed the shift of political power away from imperialists of North, Central, and North-west India; it was the period just before the arrival of the Muslim conquerors; and it was the period in which for one reason or another Buddhism all but disappeared from its motherland. While these circumstances might appear to indicate a "decline" according to certain interpretations of history, the fact remains that in terms of the pattern of development that can be observed within the Indian Religious Tradition itself this was the period of India's greatest maturity.

In summary it can be said that the *Consolidation* of the Indian Religious Tradition took a uniquely Indian form. In terms of the Indian Tradition, political power should never be an end in itself. The Mauryan conquest (of the Fourth Century B. C.) was important for the way in which it transformed a set of petty kingdoms into a state which could be an expression of the ordered life called *dharma*. The Gupta Empire (beginning in the Fourth Century A.D.) was important for the way in which it elevated that conception of statehood to even higher levels as the kings became patrons of the arts and sponsors of the cultic life of the community. In the next period the strong empires in Bengal, the Deccan and the South enjoyed relative peace and stability and expressed their greatness in the construction of magnificent temples. This pattern in socio-political development might be interpreted variously, but in terms of the Indian Religious Tradition it was an evidence of maturity, which worked toward a fuller expression of the religious ideals.

In societies where the discovery of new truth is all important and where philosophical systems have to be constructed and reconstructed to serve this end it is difficult to imagine a world view in which the task of philosophy is limited and

1. See Chapter Six.

2. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 69, 74.

can in a certain sense be fulfilled. In the Indian context the task of philosophy was born when the vision of the seers had to be reconciled with the demands of *dharma* and with the rich imaginations of men of devotion. In the course of meeting these needs Indian philosophy went through a number of phases. While the Buddhist philosophers concentrated on the structuring of the Ideal world in relation to this one, their Orthodox counterparts found ways of accepting the richness of this pluralistic world as a means to salvation. When Śaṅkara restated these two problems and reasserted the authority of the Vedic character of the Tradition, the main task of philosophy had been accomplished and all later philosophy became a commentary on Śaṅkara. Thus, while the *bhāṣya* or commentary may not seem the highest form of philosophy to one pursuing new truths it is the expression of true maturity to the Indian.

Art, in the Indian context, was not experiment but mature reflection. Aśoka and Kaniṣka had brought in accomplished foreign artists but the Indian artists learned very little from them. The Indian artists seemed always to participate in the ideas that had gone before. Śunga art reflected in stone the sermons of early Buddhist preachers of two hundred years earlier, the Gupta Buddha reached fulfillment about three hundred years after the Roman artists in Gāndhāra had begun experimenting with that subject, and the earliest temples followed the wide acceptance of the cult by five hundred years. Art in this Tradition was the fulfillment of a complex synthesis. It depended on the political and social order which made a great concentration of wealth and energy possible. It depended on a clarity of conception and acceptance of iconography which only a mature philosophy and cultic practice could make possible. With these things accomplished the artist could give expression to the heart of the Tradition. He could cut across and uncover the warmth and vitality with which the participants in the Tradition lived. The artists were not out of harmony with the soaring vision of the Upaniṣadic seers,

the severe asceticism of certain schools, or with the rigid logic of a Śaṅkara. Each of these disciplines had its place, but the artist was concerned not primarily with the goal of salvation, the means of salvation, or with the defence of the Tradition, but with the living vitality of the whole. In this sense, it is the artist who presents us with the most comprehensive picture of all.

The subsequent history of the Indian Religious Tradition was destined to be one of testing and trial. The Tradition having been "consolidated" and having attained this stage of maturity might have developed in a number of directions if left on its own But its destiny was to be challenged by a number of other traditions and its subsequent history was in a major way colored by the nature of its response to those challenges. While the following chapters are outlined in terms of those different challenges it is important to remember that the Tradition which had reached maturity in relative isolation up to this point did in fact survive and had a major say in the way it responded to its challengers. Very few religious traditions have had such a long development in isolation, or reveal such a clear pattern of development in moving from a primitive phase through prophetic formulations to the expression of rich maturity in a variety of cultural forms. From this relatively isolated development the Indian Tradition no doubt gained strength for the challenges ahead.

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PART IV

SURVIVAL OF THE TRADITION

INTRODUCTION

With the arrival of the Turkish Muslim invaders toward the end of the Twelfth Century the relative isolation of the Indian Religious Tradition was broken down. The Tradition was by this time so well established in its self-contained patterns that the outside challenges that were now presented to it did not prove overwhelming. The Tradition did not alter its basic course, but it did find it necessary to respond to the new challenges and to develop its future course in the light of those challenges.

In the succeeding centuries the Indian Tradition was challenged in three successive waves by three related, but different, non-Indian religious traditions. The rule of the Muslim invaders lasted from the end of the Twelfth Century to the middle of the Eighteenth. In the course of the Eighteenth Century the Muslims were replaced by Christian missionaries and rulers, and by the Twentieth Century these too were replaced by ambassadors of a new Technological order. All three of these challenges came from a predominantly Semitic and Western religious background and shared very little in common with the Indian Religious Tradition. Nevertheless, each posed a different set of problems for the Indian Tradition. The Turkish invaders came largely out of restless energy and the Sūfi mystics who came with them were seeking to escape unkind rulers. They had few plans for India except that it too should bow to the rule of Allāh. The British came originally because of domestic economic concerns, but in an age of ideology they soon turned India into a laboratory for testing a variety of theories on the nature of man. The ambassadors of Technology (some of whom were converted Indians) came originally to help solve practical problems, but stayed to challenge the ability of a traditional order to meet those problems. In each case, the religious interests of the challenger followed his other

interests, but they were for that reason no less serious a challenge to the integrity of the buffeted Indian Religious Tradition.

The response of the Indian Religious Tradition to these challenges was in each case tailored to the nature of the challenge. The Indian interpretation of the Muslim challenge was that it was a challenge to its art and ritual. The Indian religious bodies never bothered to answer the theological challenges of Islam (although the Sūfis learned a lot from India) and showed little interest in the Muslim social and political innovations. What they could see was the way in which their temples were thrown down and their ritual life challenged, and as a result of this challenge they developed new patterns of ritual life, and eventually new art forms based on the Muslim examples in the areas of poetry, hymnody and miniature painting. By contrast, the Christian challenge had to be understood in theological terms. While the British had shown respect for Indian art and had made only mild suggestions about transforming the social and political orders, they stated the case for an Ethical Monotheism and challenged the adequacy of a world view which rested on Monism and which expressed itself in what appeared to them to be idolatry. The Nineteenth Century Reformers of the Tradition began by giving ground in the direction of Ethical Monotheism and then proceeded to redevelop their own philosophical structures so as to provide a theological defence for the Tradition. The current technological threat is directed at the socio-political order and has been interpreted as such by the Tradition. Again the first reaction of Nehru and others was to give ground in the name of a "socialist order of society," but the latest reaction of the Tradition is to seize the initiative again and re-establish the rule of *dharma* in traditional terms.

While much of the energy of the Tradition was absorbed during this period with meeting these challenges it should not be thought that this was a purely defensive operation. These challenges have also provided the catalysts for

creative reinterpretations of the Tradition which would have been necessary in any imaginable situation. The result of these challenges to date is that the survival of the Tradition has been assured and it now finds itself taking a place in a new, more universal, religious setting.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAM

By the time the Muslim invaders arrived in India the political order had long ceased to be a major vehicle for the expression of religious vitality. In the security of the Indian subcontinent the Tradition had during the first millenium of the Christian era given its attention first to the philosophical schools that sought to reconcile the popular cults with the major Tradition and at a later stage to the artistic forms in which this synthetic Tradition could best be expressed. The philosophers and philosophical texts moved through the many kingdoms across the length and breadth of the subcontinent, and while artists moved within somewhat smaller confines there was still much borrowing between kingdoms. The Muslim conquest of the existing political order did not seem in itself much of a religious challenge.

While in the North of India temples were systematically destroyed, their images mutilated, and their stones reversed (so that the images would not be seen) and reassembled to form mosques, in the South the impact of Islam was less direct and there was more continuity in the development of the Tradition. The Muslim invasions did not really topple the political structures of the South, and rulers were allowed to carry on, although they could no longer entertain political ambitions The South received the impact of the Muslim conquest indirectly and turned inward of its own accord. Temples were still built but the religious spirit was expressed more and more in the context of isolated ritual communities whose major interest was in the nature of *bhakti* (devotion) and the rituals which sustained it.

The place of *bhakti* within the Tradition had been established by Rāmānuja in the Twelfth Century, when he insisted that the individual souls and the world were "different" from the *Brahman*, even though they were the

"body" of the Lord.[1] The philosophers of the Muslim period were anxious to restate this relationship in a way which was more consistent with their devotional practice and gave less ground to the Advaitin[2] interpretation of reality. Mādhva, the very able philosopher from the Kannada (Mysore) area in the Thirteenth Century, went beyond Rāmānuja in his attack on the Monism of Śaṅkara. Insisting that genuine *bhakti* or devotion necessitated a distinction between the soul of the devotee and the Lord who is the object of devotion, he expounded a Dualist interpretation of the Vedānta. This position seemed to lead to even further difficulties and a few centuries later Vallabha who was either a refugee from the North or a native of the Telugu area went back to Śaṅkara's monistic framework and tried within it to provide for a personal god and the experience of grace. While this position was not the strongest logically, it was consistent with the religions spirit of this period which was inclined to deny reality to the world and yet maintain the reality of the personal god.

While the philosophers were working on a philosophical defence of the ritual practice of this period. the most important developments within the ritual order itself were those associated with the rising popularity of the *Bhagavad Purāṇa* and later with the theological formulation of Southern Śaivism. The *Bhagavad Purāṇa* does not pretend to take a new philosophical direction but sets forth to reconcile the current philosophical ideas with the ritual practice. The result is that many things are explained as *acintya* or unthinkable. The Ultimate is at the same time pure consciousness and an

1. Each of the theologies mentioned in this section could be given extensive treatment. Their followers have produced numerous accounts of their work of which some are good and others not-so-good. S. Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, is a reliable guide to these extensive records.

2. 'Advaita' or non-duality is the general name used to describe the position of Śaṅkara. The term 'Vedānta' is often used in the same way but properly belongs to the wider circle of all schools which accepted the authority of the Upaniṣads.

animated expression of *śakti* or active power. The world is *māyā* in that it is unreal, but it is also *māyā* as manifest magical power. Man must seek release from the world through knowledge, but he does this primarily through the performance of *dharma*. *Dharma* in this cont xt has a radically new meaning in that it refers not to the sense of duty which maintains the *lokasamgraha* (world order), but to the single-minded devotion which prepares one for a vision of God. This is a world view in which social responsibility has little place. Gone is the Vedic concept of the joy of "works" and "assemblies" which lead to the true "vision." Gone is the Epic aristocratic society in which the establishment of the world-order or *lokasamgraha* was prerequisite for the possibility of *mokṣa*. Gone even is Śaṅkara's understanding of the importance of the performance of works for the enlightened man, and Rāmānuja's theistic ethic where in some measure man could reflect in his life the grace of God. Now the non-finality of the world combines with a rather indefinite picture of the way to salvation to create what might be unkindly described as a "scramble for salvation."

The Lord said :

> The one who has taken refuge in Me will do his particular duties (*svadharmas*) as taught by me, and will do the rites of his family, stage of life (*āśrama*), and caste (*varṇa*) with unattached mind. With a purified mind one should observe the difficulties that befall people who are attached to the material forms (*guṇas*) and consider them as real. As the vision of material forms by a sleeping man or the imaginings of a dreaming man are forever changing so is the thinking of the one attached to material forms.
>
> Intent on Me one should give up actions that continue transmigration and perform actions that lead to cessation. Being embarked on the quest for Truth one should pay no attention to the injunctions to work.[1]

Southern Śaivism developed its distinctive form during the period under review. It shared some of the same ritual

1. Selected verses from the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* Chapter 11.

tendencies evident in the movements influenced by the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* but it had a more rigidly formulated cultic life to fall back on and developed a somewhat clearer theological position. Here the starting point was a rigidly consistent theism. Śiva, the Lord (*Pati*), was the only power, the only Reality, in all experience. This was a theism based not on the providential care of the Father image, but on the power of the Lord set forth in the mythology in terms of a remote figure gaining *tapas* (ascetic power) in the mountains, and in the cultic life through the symbol of the organ of power, the *linga.* When the cult of Śiva was brought into the major Tradition it fit well with an Advaitin view of the phenomenal world and the sole reality of the Lord beyond. In this cultic context the unreality of the world was reinterpreted and expressed in terms of the cycle of creation and destruction, so that the world, the souls, and the bonds which bind the souls were real but only as part of very temporary order. Salvation was not the quiet realization of the Ultimate but the wild devotion of self abandonment in which the bonds were broken and the self and its līlā (game) were thrown at the feet of the Lord. Here, as in the Bhagavata community, devotion was an individual matter, but there was less variety and more of the discipline which recognizes that all is foolishness before God. Śaivism too lacked the older inner-worldly understanding of the role of *dharma*, but it provided a way of life marked by intense inner anguish and quiet disciplined behaviour, two characteristics well suited to resist the challenge of aggressive Western religion.

While the South was developing its own patterns of inwardness, the North of India was directly under the power of Islamic rule and was forced once again by history to search for a creative new direction for the Tradition. One acquainted with Mediterranean and European religious history might have expected North India to produce a blend of Islam and Indian religion. Such a blend was found in the new cult of Sikhism which arose in the Fifteenth Century. Sikhism in its beginnings and throughout its history carefully

sought to combine the militant theism of Islam with the devotionalism and cultic symbolism of the Indian Religious Tradition. However, cultic symbols offended the Muslims on the one hand and on the other the demythologized God of Sikhism was too uninteresting for the majority of Indians. In spite of the greater theological affinity to Islam, the place of Sikhism in religious history is that it gradually became one of the cultic communities that flourish within the rich foliage of the Indian Tradition. The fact that this cultic community has maintained a relatively more exclusive character than most of the older cults has made for practical problems, but it hardly qualifies Sikhism as a distinctive religious tradition. In one sense the rise of Sikhism probably closed the door to the possibility of an even wider movement within the Indian Tradition in the direction of Islam.

The major creative development during this period in the Religious Tradition of India is to be seen in the contribution of the men usually grouped together under the label of "medieval saints". There were a good many of these "saints" and they were found in most of the major areas of India in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Some, such as Kabīr, lived very close to the ecstatic Sūfis of Islam, but the major influences on them seem to have been from their own Tradition. Most of them accepted a theology similar to that of Vallabha[1] which enabled them to believe in the grace of a personal God while accepting the world as ultimately unreal. They were characterized by an ecstatic experience of the self which was usually described as a fire which in its love for the Lord consumed the body and all about it. Typical of the medieval saints was Chaitanya around whom a cultic community formed in Bengal early in the Sixteenth Century. Trained in Sanskrit, taught by Advaitin teachers, and influenced by the Kṛṣṇa devotion of his day, his own religious experience was marked by an intensity of devotion which he contended produced a transformation of both his body and mind. The

1. See page 98 of this text.

community which resulted from his experience has been a major force in the emotional artistry of later Bengal. In some ways the peak reached by these medieval "saints" represented the furthest development of the role of emotion in religion anywhere, and thus it illustrates one of the strongest aspects of the Indian Religious Tradition and one of the reasons for its appeal to the Twentieth Century youth of the West.

The final task of the Tradition during the Muslim period was to translate the renewed vision of the "saints" into artistic forms which could be appropriated by all the people. Thus toward the end of this period there was a development of popular religious literature, and of popular ("Rājput")[1] religious painting. The classic of popular religious literature from this period was Tulsīdāss' Hindi version of the Rāmāyana called the *Rāma-Charitmānas.* In this work the power of the older mythology faded away and was replaced by the heroism of the manly Hanumān and a variety of local moral precepts. *Dharma* was no longer the code of the aristocratic warriors, but a complex of behaviour patterns, many of which reflected the fears and superstitions of a world populated by animistic spirits. Within this context the inner fire of the "saints" was taken out of its Vedāntic setting and turned into the cry of the self as it attempts to pick its way through the hostile powers of the world. Here the warmth of the earlier Indian naturalism was lost and the relaxed freedom of the vines and Yakṣīs of Sāñchi gave way to spirit-possessing trees and the deluding power of sex against which one must be on guard.

> When she heard this her cruel heart throbbed fast, as when a ripe boil has been touched. But even such pain she concealed with a smile, like the wife of a thief who weeps not openly. The king did not fathom her guileful

1 This is the general name given to a great variety of paintings done by Indian artists not associated with the Mughal court "Mughal Painting" is similar except that it was associated with the court and usually portrayed secular subjects.

PLATE 20 : Rājput Painting

PLATE 21 · Rājput Painting

cunning, for she had been taught by a mistress in the art of a myriad crooked wiles. Though the monarch was skilled in statecraft, the ways of a woman are like the ocean, unfathomable.

* * *

When Hanumān (the monkey-god) saw that Vibhīsān was utterly exhausted, he rushed forward with a mountain in his hand. He overthrew the chariot with its horses and its charioteer and kicked Rāvan (the demon-king) on the chest. The demon stood his ground but trembled all over. Vibhīsān returned to the saviour of his servants. Then Rāvan struck the monkey with a shout of defiance, and the monkey spread his tail and ascended to the sky. Rāvan grasped his tail, but the monkey flew on, carrying him with him. Then the mighty Hanumān turned and grappled with him; there in the sky they fought, warriors equally matched, smiting each other in fury.

* * *

The most truly profitable end a man can seek is this—devotion to the feet of Rāma in thought and word and deed...It was when I wore this body that faith in Rāma took root in my heart, and that is why...I love it best of all. Though death is at my own disposal, yet quit I not this body, for, as the Vedas say, the disembodied cannot worship. In former days I was tortured by foolish doubts; I resisted Rāma and found no rest even in sleep. Throughout my various lives I practised all manner of expedients—austerity, proper penance, sacrifice and charity; what womb was there in which I was not born as I wandered ..through the world ? I have tried and experienced every practical means ..but have never been so happy as I am now.[1]

Rājput painting was not completely devoid of the warmth of earlier Indian art (Plates 20, 21). The animals, the

1. From W. D. Hill, *The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma*; an English translation of *Tulsī Dās's Ramacritamānasa*, (Oxford, 1952), pp. 173, 413, 375-6

forests and the human bodies often pulsated with life and the curving rhythm of the line carried much of the movement of old. Nevertheless, the art style was dependent on the secular art of the 'Mughal' school and the religious themes were no longer the enlightenment of the Buddha and the exploits of Epic heroes. The Rājput paintings were religious lessons for the common people. They sometimes used traditional stories, but often they did not. In either case they taught a moral, a truth about the complex world of varied beings in the midst of which men lived, and set a pattern of behaviour by which one could deal with that world.

In the popular art of word and brush the Indian religious leader found his answer to the sermons from the Koran. The content was different but the ritual structure was much the same. The Indians had found a way to "hear the word and do it." It was not the Indian Tradition at its best, but it met the precise challenge of the Muslim religious path.

The Muslim period in Indian history is often skipped over as if India's culture were set in a deep freeze to be brought out again seven hundred years later. One could hardly be farther from the truth when talking about the religious history. The Indian Tradition went into this period as a confident, self-contained whole with a clear but fading concept of *dharma* and the socio-political order it sustained, with a powerfully conceived *mokṣa* supported by complex philosophical structures, and with a rich understanding of *bhakti* manifest in a most expressive wealth of art. By the end of the period, the extended political dominance of the Muslims had shattered the relevance of *dharma*; *mokṣa* had been replaced by a set of hopes and fears not unlike the heavens and hells of other traditions; and *bhakti* which had carried the Tradition during much of the period had come to be interpreted as pure emotionalism and an accompaniment to moralizing. Thus, while some of the direction of the Tradition had been lost, it had survived, it had discovered new emotional depths, and it had become irremovably incor-

porated into the life of the common people. It had been an age for the ritual dominance of religion. Islam had challenged the ritual of the Indian Tradition and the answer had been given in ritual terms. To a Western religious man who can remember when his religion was dominated by theology and is aware that it is more and more dominated by its social forms, it may seem unmodern and unintelligent, in a word "primitive," for a religious tradition to be preoccupied with ritual. This is a valid but superficial judgement. From the view of the historian the ritual element is often the toughest and most basic cultural manifestation of religious experience. The period in which ritual dominates the Tradition does not look strong (social) or creative (philosophical), but it is sometimes the period in which the most basic developments in the religion take place, and there is good reason to believe that this was true of the Indian Tradition in the Muslim period.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTIANITY

Having faced the threat of Islam to her ritual patterns the Indian Religious Tradition found herself confronted with the Christian theology of Ethical Monotheism. While Islam was also theistic, even in a very radical sense, its message did not come to India in a theological dress and its challenge was never really answered in those terms. In contrast to the Muslim arrival with large migrations of people and crusadings armies, the Christian challenge was brought by a relatively small number of administrators of a confident and expansionist culture. By the beginning of the Nineteenth Century Christian Britain had transformed its understanding of life into the form of an ideology[1] which she believed could be a civilizing influence in the life of all men and societies. When this ideology reached the shores of India, the Indian Religious Tradition was confronted with a serious theological alternative.

The Christian challenge to the Indian Religious Tradition was slow in developing. The Portugese who settled in a few pockets on the West coast as early as the Fifteenth Century marched in with their cross and their gun much as the earlier Muslim invaders had with their Koran and sword. This was a threat to the ritual life of those in the immediate area who were "converted," but it had little theological impact on the Indian Tradition. When in the Sixteenth Century the great Mughal Emperor Akbar set up his discussion on Comparative Religion in his court, he included priests from the Portugese colonies, but apparently they did not make a formidable impression. When the Dutch, French and later English traders came in the Seven-

1. The term 'ideology' has been defined in various ways. It is used here to characterize an intellectual pattern which has taken on the character of a 'movement' or socio-political programme.

teenth Century they were at first very particular to stick to their business and were even opposed to missionaries coming in and complicating the business arrangements they had made. This attitude began to change only after the competition between the French and English became so keen in the Eighteenth Century that the home governments were drawn into administration and the working out of policy. It was only with the great debates in England during the early decades of the Nineteenth Century, after the English had gained control of most of India by driving out the French and subduing the native rulers, that there was an occasion provided for the formulation of a Christian attitude toward the Indian Tradition.

The debates leading up to the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1833 were essentially theological.[1] On the one side were a few conservatives who would have chosen to leave India alone as much as possible either because as Orientalists they believed they saw important value in India's own culture or as Administrators they feared the complexity of trying to rule such a vast domain. The overwhelming weight, however, was on the other side. The Free Traders had been convinced by Adam Smith that they would benefit if the government would take away the monopoly of the East India Company and create European economic conditions in India. The Utilitarian followers of Bentham believed that all men could be similarly civilized by laws based on reason, and James and John Mill were in the India House attempting to implement these ideas with regard to India. Finally the Evangelicals who had recently started missionary work in India used their spokesman Wilberforce to convince the government that their concern to Christianize India was essentially the same as that of the civilizing Utilitarians, and that their schools and hospitals would serve this end. This discussion implied that the Indian society of that day was not civilized and that the

1. The term 'theological' is used here in a very broad sense which includes the categories 'ideological' and 'philosophical' among others

religion of India was leading it to further uncivilized patterns of social behaviour. A lot was made in this connection of practices such as *sati* (burning the widow on the husband's funeral pyre) and untouchability and of the large numbers and seemingly ambiguous ethical character of Indian deities. The conclusion was summed up in the famous vision of Macaulay that among the Indians there should be created "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and intellect."[1,2]

The Christian challenge to the Indian Religious Tradition did not long maintain the note of clarity and ideological confidence struck in 1833. For twenty years the government structure established at that time attempted to implement this policy and missionaries flooded in, a reforming system of law was established, and most important, a whole network of English schools and colleges was set up. The result of this reforming zeal was the Indian Mutiny of 1857 which once and for all shook the confidence of the Christian challenge. After this point the crown took direct charge of the governing of India and cynically did what was expedient with little ideological motive. The missionaries continued their work, but had to tailor their challenge to the various rejoinders offered by the leaders of an increasingly vocal Indian Religious Tradition. After 1857 the initiative passed to those within the Indian Religious Tradition who saw some relevance to the theological dialogue which arose from this Christian challenge.

In the early decades of the Nineteenth Century a man named Rām Mohan Roy[3] came on the scene to give a reply to the Christian challenge, even as it was being formulated, and for that reason has been called the "Father of Modern India". True to a Tradition where change was a constant

1. T. B. Macaulay, (Selected by G. M. Young) *Prose and Poetry*, (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1952), p. 729.
2. A good general summary of this period is found in P. Spear, *India*, (Ann Arbor, 1961)
3. For the exact dates of the figures mentioned here please consult the date list at the beginning of this book.

phenomenon, Rām Mohan Roy did not complain against the presence of the Christian challenge but chose to welcome it, to give a great deal of ground away, and then to take a stand in an area of the Tradition he felt to be sound. To the orthodox within his Tradition at the time, and to some subsequent Indian leaders, it may have seemed that Roy gave away too much ground, but when compared to the difficulties that the Islamic and Chinese civilizations had in answering the aggressive Christian challenge of the Nineteenth Century, the base from which the Indians chose to answer seems to have been a sound one.

Roy's openness is seen for instance in the introduction to his own analysis of the teachings of Jesus when he said :

> This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of one God, who has equally subjected all creatures, without distinction of caste, rank, or wealth, to change, disappointment, pain and death, and has equally admitted all to be partakers of the bountiful mercies which he has lavished over nature, and is also so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves, and to society, that I cannot but hope the best effects from its promulgation in its present form.[1]

But taking his stand in his own Tradition he replied to a missionary by saying :

> If by the "ray of intelligence" for which the Christian says we are indebted to the English, he means the introduction of useful mechanical arts, I am ready to express my assent and also my gratitude ; but with respect to *science, literature*, or *religion*, I do not acknowledge that we are placed under any obligation. For by a reference to History it may be proved that the world was indebted to *our ancestors* for the first dawn of knowledge, which sprang up in the East, thanks to the Goddess of Wisdom...[2]

1. *The English Works of Rāja Rāmmohan Roy*, (Allahabad, 1960), p. 485.

2. *Ibid*, p. 906.

The organization which Rām Mohan Roy founded was the Brāhmo Samāj. In its early days this society was very much like a Unitarian or Deist Church in the Western world. They worshipped one god, they read from a book of religious writings and they discussed the ethical implications of religious belief as understood in this rationalist framework. They rejected the non-rational character of religion, which in relation to the Indian Tradition included all sectarianism and all the ritual of the home, and in relation to Christianity meant accepting Jesus as an ethical teacher while rejecting his deity. The influence of the Brāhmo Samāj was much wider than its own borders and it probably represented the dominant attitude of the Indians with English education in the early Nineteenth Century. Its basic attitude is still reflected in many Indian institutions, such as the English medium schools and the English language press, which cling to a vague Ethical Theism.

The rationalistic ethics and the naked theism which characterized the Brāhmo Samāj were not destined to be adequate answers to India's needs or adequate representations of her Tradition. Roy's contribution to theological thought was rather thin. His major contribution was in establishing his position within the framework of the Indian Religious Tradition. In doing this he established the principle that all reformulations of the Indian understanding of life in the modern period would be within that framework, and India would be saved the agonizing question of whether or not it should set aside its Tradition.

While Roy had made clear that the answer to the Christian challenge would come from within the Indian Religious Tradition, it was left for those who came after him to formulate the specific nature of the reply. In the broadest terms the early replies fell into two categories : those who minimized the ethical challenge and developed the understanding of theism in their own way, and those who minimized the theistic question but developed an ethical concern consistent with the more traditional Indian view of the

Ultimate. Only at a later point when these two concerns came together again was the Indian Religious Tradition able to set forth a forceful new philosophical position, depending on, but going beyond, the issues raised by the original Christian challenge.

Rām Mohan Roy's successor at the head of the Brāhmo Samāj was Debendranāth Tagore. Debendranāth Tagore did not continue the practice of having scriptures read but insisted that in the traditional Indian manner the insight of the holy man was the real authority. He also altered the character of the discussion so that ethical concerns were made subordinate to discussions of the nature of salvation, and Tagore himself refused to give up his own caste position. The result was that the Brāhmo Samāj ceased to be the centre of an Ethical Monotheism and became more the centre of an "artistic theism". This tendency to pursue the understanding of "god" in the context of a richly Indian emotionalism continued under Keshab Chandra Sen, the third head of the Brāhmo Samāj, and reached its finest expression in the internationally known thought of Rabīndranāth Tagore. Expressing the spirit of "artistic theism" in prose Tagore says in a work entitled *Personality* :

> Man, in his instinct, is almost blindly sure that, however dense be his envelopment, he is to be born from Nature's womb to the world of spirit,—the world where he has his freedom of creation; where he is in cooperation with the infinite, where his creation and God's creation are to become one in harmony.[1]

In a more poetic form at the end of *Gitanjali* he says :

> In one salutation to thee, my God, let
> all my senses spread out and touch this
> world at thy feet.
>
> Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.
>
> Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

1. (London, 1959), p. 92-93.

> Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.[1]

"Artistic theism" was deeply rooted in the devotional sects which had developed during the Muslim period and especially in that of Chaitanya who was from Bengal where the Brāhmo Samāj originated. This approach had the advantage of bringing out the best in the Indian Tradition while providing a point of theological contact with both Muslims and Christians.

The attempts to establish an "ethical monism," an ethical system consistent with an Advaitin or monistic view of the universe, were more numerous and more complex. The first attempt was made by Dayānanda Saraswatī the founder of the Ārya Samāj. A reformer like Roy he condemned all the ritual practice of sectarian Indian religion as idolatry and sought to re-establish the Indian Religious Tradition on the authority of the Veda alone. Severely disciplined and anti-Christian the Ārya Samāj was destined to remain a narrow movement.

Another Monist, Swāmī Vivekānanda, on visiting the West, found that a concern for universal religion made a clear Monist position acceptable in some Western circles, so he held to that position while imitating the Christian practice of establishing schools and hospitals. In contrast to Saraswatī, who was left with a narrow devoted following, Vivekānanda's solution proved more widely acceptable. By the early decades of the Twentieth Century most educated Indians had decided to hold to a fairly orthodox theology while working for social reforms, without concerning themselves very much with the relationship between the two. This solution was satisfactory for a while, but when the Freedom Struggle began around the turn of the century and the issues were sharpened the relationship between the two areas had to be more carefully re-examined.

1. (London, 1961), p. 94.

The most daring attempt of the early Twentieth Century to establish the position of "ethical monism" was that of B. G. Tilak. A leading figure in the Freedom Struggle at one time Tilak later broke away from the movement which he felt had adopted a gradualist and rationalist British Utilitarian view of reality. Thrown into prison Tilak found time to set forth his own ideas in a long commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā* call the *Gītā Rahasya.* In this work he argued that the message of the *Gītā* and the heart of the Indian Religious Tradition was the doctrine of "action." His basic view of reality was still a Monistic one for *Brahman* alone is Real, but the religious way enjoined is not one of ascetic withdrawal or of esoteric knowledge but of Action in accord with prescribed *dharma.* What he recommended was vigorous and sometimes violent action in the midst of the world, not in order to perfect or better the world as such, but to establish *dharma,* establish the world order (*lokasaṁgraha*), and in doing so to become one with *Brahman.*

> Therefore, the *Gītā* religion fuses the Knowledge of the Brahman contained in the Upanisads, which is cognisable only to the Intelligence, with the "king of mysticisms" (rāja-guhya) of the worship of the Perceptible which is accessible to Love, and consistently with the ancient tradition of ritualistic religion, it proclaims to everybody, though nominally to Arjunā, that, "perform lifelong your several worldly duties according to your respective positions in life, desirelessly, for the universal good, with a Self-Identifying vision, and enthusiastically, and thereby perpetually worship the duty in the shape of the Paramātman (the Highest Ātman), Which is Eternal, and Which uniformly pervades the Body of all created things as also the Cosmos ; because, therein lies your happiness in this world and in the next" ; and on that account, the mutual conflict between Action, Spiritual Knowledge (Jñāna), and Love (Devotion) is done away with, and the single *Gītā* religion, which preaches that the whole of one's life

should be turned into a Sacrifice (Yajña), contains the essence of the entire Vedic religion.[1]

Tilak's message was so clear, so radical, and moved so clearly away from any compromise with Christian virtues that it seemed politically inexpedient to most of his contemporaries. But for the theological leaders of the Tradition it proved a new base for reflection and was in that sense destined to be very important

The radical stand of Tilak provided the background for the more moderate, complex and politically expedient position of Mahātma Gāndhi. Gāndhi shared with Tilak the conviction that the Monist position was essentially correct and that the message of the *Gītā* was a message of action In this sense he understood human history in essentially static terms and insisted that the action to be performed was to be action prescribed by *dharma*. Thus his view of *dharma* was related to the individual and his place in the scheme of reality. One had to act in the light of *dharma* whatever the consequences. From these springs of theological motivation, so similar to those of Tilak, Gāndhi went forth to act in a way very unlike Tilak. His choice of nonviolence rather than violence has sometimes been given deep theological meaning, either in terms of the Indian virtue of *ahiṃsā* or in terms of Christian virtues mediated to him through Quaker friends or his reading of Tolstoy. This choice, however, was probably more a matter of temperament and environment than theology. It was Gāndhi's good fortune that Christians were able to see the merit in his action, and withdraw their political oppression, while allowing him to define his theological motivation in his own way.

The result of the separate developments of "artistic theism" and "ethical monism" at the beginning of the Twentieth Century was that as time went on the Indian Tradition was in a position to bring these developments together and set forth a number of major philosophical syntheses. The most thorough and philosophically perceptive of

1. B. G. Tilak, *Śrimad-Bhagavad Gītā-Rahasya* (Poona, 1965), p. 713.

these philosophical syntheses was that of Aurobindo Ghose. At the turn of the century Aurobindo was an ally of Tilak and a political activist. He suddenly withdrew from this activity and spent the latter half of his life in writing and meditation at his *āśrama* in Pondicherry. Called Integral Philosophy his position attempted to combine a strict Monism, in which the Self enters into union with *Brahman*, with an evolutionary view of the universe, in which the Enlightened Self through a kind of involution can return to the evolving universe and lead it to ever expanding levels of consciousness. Stating the nature of the search for Reality he said :

> To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental, illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realize the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation,—this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution.[1]

In theory this position took the evolving life of all beings (including the social order) very seriously, but the followers of Aurobindo have tended to emphasize the call to meditation and to withdraw from practical ethical concerns.

A more eclectic philosophical synthesis has been set forth by Sarvapalli Rādhākrishnan, a former President of India. Rādhākrishnan has lived much closer to the Christian challenge than many of the other Indian religious leaders and has formulated his synthesis more clearly in response to that challenge. Interpreting Monism as an Idealistic philosophy he has tried to show that the Indian

1. *The Life Divine*, (Calcutta, 1939), p. 2.

Tradition is essentially eclectic, and that while truth emerges beyond any human formulation thereof there is nevertheless real meaning in history. In contrast to Tilak and Gāndhi he thinks of action within history as motivated by the transformation of society in terms of certain ideals (he uses the term "Kingdom of God" in this context).[1] He would only insist that the energy of this transformation cannot itself be deified as it was by Marx, and in a certain sense by Hegel, and that all "ways" are but symbolic reflections of the one Ultimate.

Finally, the Christian challenge of the Nineteenth Century was returned in kind during the mid-Twentieth Century by Vedāntin missionaries to the West. The best organized of these groups was the Rāmakrishna Mission started by Vivekānanda. Unconcerned about the reformulation of theology and ethics so that they fit one another, the Rāmakrishna Mission held rigidly to a Monist theology while starting schools and hospitals in India and later establishing well organized mission centers throughout the Western world. One might question whether this form of activity was true to the Indian Tradition or relevant to the present needs of the Tradition. Nevertheless, it is a perfect illustration of the contention of this chapter that the Christian challenge made the philosophical issue central. In the Rāmakrishna Mission centers the Indian Tradition responded to the Christian challenge with what it considered its most eminent religious philosophy. The fact that this philosophy was seen in isolation from the rest of the Tradition was the result of the nature of the Christian challenge and not the choice of the Indian Tradition.

Christian missionaries and Rāmakrishna missionaries would like to believe that the theological dialogue which characterized the first half of the Twentieth Century is still alive. In a certain measure of course it is, but it is no longer the central concern of the Indian Religious Tradition. Theological formulation is probably more central to the

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, (London, 1948), p. 78

Christian Tradition than to any other. That the Christian challenge could bring out the theological depth and general philosophical interest of the Indian Tradition is not surprising. All the same, it would appear that philosophy once again ceased to be the central concern of the Indian Religious Tradition as socio-political issues came to the forefront in the Post-Independence period.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE CHALLENGE OF TECHNOLOGY

While it has not been generally recognized, the last thirty years have represented the beginnings of the challenge of Technology to the Indian Religious Tradition. Because of the disguised nature of Technology's message, many Indians continued to think of the challenge in terms of the older Christian encounter. Fortunately for India, Nehru the visionary recognized the nature of this challenge from the very beginning and gave little or no thought to the earlier Christian challenge even though it befell him to play a large role in the dissolution of the Christian political power in India.

The nature of the challenges that Technology thrust at the Indian Religious Tradition is varied and very difficult to evaluate. Gāndhi thought the real issue was the nature of production and the life of the factory worker. Others feared the economic ties and political alliances that erode national independence. Still others feared the breakdown in family authority and the resultant social changes that are implied. Looked at from a more distant perspective it would appear that each of these challenges might in itself have been handled adequately. What really gave teeth to the challenges of Technology and made certain changes in the Tradition inevitable was the fact that medical technology produced vast changes in the population picture and called into question the traditional static view of society.

The Tradition's older, more static, view of society placed a high value on "order" and on the non-productive aspects of social behavior. This was in many ways a very commendable view of human life, and it worked well in older periods of India's history when her heavy population was scattered quite evenly throughout her thousands of villages. In this society people were not seen as units of production

or consumption and India valued her population as the flesh of her social order. For some time after the introduction of medical technology Indian thinkers continued to take the position that her population was her wealth. Only after years of relatively poor agricultural production did the size of the growth in population and the resulting shortage of food begin to force a re-thinking of the nature of human life and society.

As long as the Indian Tradition could look upon her society in static terms she could simply deny Technology's claim that perpetual "progress" was an essential ingredient of human life. She had argued back through Gāndhi and others that "progress" might be a doctrine advocated by one point of view but it represented only a passing ideology and India could do without it. Now that she had to feed so many people the advocates of Technology were back at the door to warn the Indian Tradition that only with increasingly sophisticated fertilizers could she feed her society, and in that these "increasingly sophisticated" fertilizers could only come from a society committed to "progress", India would have to be converted. It was not a foolproof argument but it seemed a very strong one.

Indian society had always been relatively self-contained. Geography had given it relatively secure borders and the distinctive development of her culture had tended to preserve her in this independent position. Now the leaders of Technology argued that India would have to give up this self-contained status. It was argued in the 1950's that India could not defend herself alone and should join a military alliance. It was argued in the 1960's that she could not produce the fertilizers she needed, and would have to make economic alliances with more powerful nations who would direct her into a social and political order consistent with the doctrines of Technology.

Finally, the advocates of Technology argue that if the static view of society does not know how to care for the dramatic new increase in population, if industrialization has

to take place, if military and economic alliances must be made to meet the new situation, then the educational system should be handed over to the high priests of Technology and the older Indian Religious Tradition be either set aside or be radically altered. These arguments are formidable ones whether they come from officials of the United States government or from American-educated Indians. The arguments are so forcefully put that at present there is usually very little pause to hear the answers that are being given.

Answers to this challenge of Technology are coming forth from the Indian Tradition and are surprisingly complex. The first answer given came from the latter part of Gāndhi's career when he suddenly realized that the major challenge was not from the Christian corner. Gāndhi had not really assessed the nature of the new challenge when he said that factories were of no value and India could produce all she needed through her village craftsmen. He still acted as if he were countering one theology with another and failed to discern the practical nature of the response that had to be given to medical technology's radical transformation of his society.

> This (Western) civilization is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people in Europe that those who are in it appear to be half-mad. They lack real physical strength or courage. They keep up their energy by intoxication. They can hardly be happy in solitude. Women, who should be the queens of households, wander in the streets or they slave away in factories. For the sake of a pittance, half a million women in England alone are labouring under trying circumstances in factories or similar institutions.
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> This civilization is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed. According to the teachings of Mahomed this would be considered a Satanic Civilization. Hinduism calls it the Black Age.[1]

1. *Hind Swarāj*, (Ahmedabad, 1946), p. 27.

Gāndhi's disciple, Vinobā Bhāve, has continued to follow his line of resistance to Technology and has developed more complex answers, some of which at the village level are of practical merit. This kind of response has the great merit of capturing that element in the imagination of every Indian which says that he must be true to his Tradition and that the way of Technology is in some measure a threat to that Tradition. But beyond providing a warning for the Tradition, the position of Gāndhi and Bhāve appears to be ineffectual. In the long run, it answers an ideology directing its message to the question of the nature of society, with solutions that are only vaguely concerned with the nature of society and are really explanations of the nature of the Ultimate. Both Gāndhi and Bhāve fail to return to the Ancient Tradition's prescriptions for society. Rather they try to hold to the theology of the Tradition and to imagine what a view of society consistent with that might be. The product of their imagination emerges as an ideal too weak to provide a basis for practical action.

The second answer to the challenge of Technology is that which is associated with the position of India's late Prime Minister Jawaharlāl Nehru. Traditionalists might wonder if Nehru's position is an answer from the Indian Religious Tradition or if it is not simply an acceptance of the ideology of Technology. While he gave a lot of ground, Nehru clearly intended to provide what he thought was the only practical answer to the new challenge. He saw very early the real nature of the challenge. While respecting tradition, Nehru realised that artistic and theological answers would have no meaning in relation to the questions raised. He saw that the challenge would be economic and knew that India would have to produce all that her resources and her talents would allow her. He also saw that the challenge was political and that India would have to fight to hold her relatively independent position. Nehru has often been pictured as a wide-eyed idealist who thought that his doctrine of non-alignment would save the world. It is probably more likely that he saw non-alignment as a

practical opportunity in an age of ideology to buy time until India's industries could become reasonably competitive. In this Nehru was eminently right and India did much better than most countries at preserving her freedom while making some industrial progress during the 1950's. What Nehru did not realize was that practically it would be the population issue which would be the toughest test. Nor did he realize until too late that the traditional order of village society could be his strongest ally in preserving India's independence. His successors were left with the formidable tasks of controlling population and of developing the political order at the village level. However they had some room to work because Nehru had already built up the elements of an industrial base and convinced the outside world of the independent character of the Indian society.

Nehru described his vision for modern Indian society as "socialist" :

> I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems lies in Socialism, and when I use this word I do so not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific economic sense. Socialism is, however, something even more than an economic doctrine; it is a philosophy of life and as such also it appeals to me I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through Socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the ending of vested interests in land and industry, as well as the feudal and autocratic Indian states system. That means the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of cooperative service. It means ultimately a change in our instincts, habits and desires. In short, it means a new civilization, radically different from the present capitalist order.[1]

1. *Important Speeches of Jawaharlāl Nehru*, (NewDelhi, 1949), p 13.

In practice Nehru's call for Socialism involved two attitudes which he derived from Marx and which were new to India. One that could be seen early in Nehru's career was that history has its own rhythms which must be met if one is to control the changing pattern and bring about a better society. Nehru was a veritable genius at sensing the course of history and in this certainly introduced a new element into the Indian Tradition. The other new attitude in Nehru's understanding was that the state should control many of the basic production industries and run them for the good of the nation. Thus a new idea of the meaning of nationhood was born and the state was used not only to maintain political order, but to provide economic order as well. Nehru, however, did not interpret the role of the state in a thoroughly Marxian sense for he saw the economic operations of the state more as a means for maintaining order in areas essential to the very existence of society than as a means for the creation of a new social structure. He doubtless toyed with the idea of a gradual revolution in society in which the traditional caste authority at the village level would be completely overthrown, but if he did he certainly had his own doubts. The practice of his government would indicate that he saw Marxist Socialism only as a way of making an essentially Indian society sufficiently aware of history to keep pace with the external competition and to give the state enough control of the economy to fulfill its traditional role of "preserver of order."

Even before Nehru's death a new class of leaders was emerging to guide the social development of the Indian Tradition. Some of these, such as his successor Lāl Bahādur Śāstri, saw little need for continuing Socialist slogans and understood the role of the state in traditional terms as a vigorous preserver of "order." Śāstri pursued the war effort more vigorously than Nehru had, and he also allowed more freedom to the traditional social leaders from among whom he himself had come. In a broadcast to the nation on October 10, 1965, at the end of the Pakistan-Indian Conflict, he said :

> The events of the past few weeks have roused the entire nation to a new and deeply felt awareness of its responsibilities. Foremost among them is the preservation of our freedom. We were suddenly faced with an unprecedented challenge, but this was met swiftly and effectively. The brave Indian soldier and air man provided the answer.
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> * * *
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> The preservation of freedom is not the task of soldiers alone. The whole nation has to be strong.
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> * * *
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> The lesson which we all must learn and whose implications we must all accept deep down in our hearts is that for the preservation of freedom we must have the necessary internal strength and that we must be as self-reliant as possible.
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> * * *
>
> Self-reliance does not mean that we have everything that we need No country in the world is self-sufficient in all respects. Self-reliance is an attitude of mind......Self-reliance means the capacity to make the utmost of what we have and the courage to do without what we do not and cannot have.[1]

With Śāstri's early death the Congress Party has become diffused and the leadership of the traditionalist approach seems to be passing into the hands of the Jana Sangha Party.

The strength of the traditionalist approach is that it is a social answer to a social problem. With these leaders the ritual life of the community and the philosophy of Monism are set into the background even though they still echo some of the anti-Muslim and anti-Christian sentiment of previous generations. Their major interest is in the preservation and revitalization of the traditional Indian social order. They know from personal experience the pervasiveness and strength

1. *The Meaning of Self-Reliance*, (New Delhi, 1965), p. 11-13.

of this order at the village level. They also know that while this strength was there through seven hundred years of Muslim and Christian rule it was not able to assert itself at the national level. To them the challenge of Technology comes as both a golden opportunity and a serious danger. It provides new issues for the Tradition which they as socio-political leaders feel they can answer. At the same time it threatens to destroy even the village level social order if the Tradition fails to answer the social and political needs of the day. It is a moment of great importance to the Tradition and her leaders know it.

The Traditionalists argue that the solution must come from the socio-political theories of ancient India. The state must become committed to the ordering of life according to *dharma*. Stated to a Western political scientist this sounds like the medieval European idea of Church over State. The analogy however is not very accurate, for the traditional conception of *dharma* provided that the state should be divorced from ideology and should be enjoined to fulfill the needs of *artha* or the order and well being of her people. In pursuit of this goal the political life of the state is a simple matter of the proper use of power. In this spirit the contemporary traditionalists are strong advocates of the development of modern military equipment, including atomic weapons, and strong advocates of efficient and modern industrialization. Their concern is that these modern techniques should be used as prescribed by *dharma* and should not be allowed to make the development process itself the end for which society is established. It is on this last point that they feel they depart dramatically from the Way of Technology and so they are fighting vigorously for the clearly independent forms of the political and cultural order, such as the exclusive use of a language which puts them in touch with their own Religious Tradition. With the political and social order in its conception reoriented to the Tradition they feel that Nehru's obsession with independence from military and economic alliances becomes unnecessary and these matters can be decided according to

a rational view of the balancing of power in the particular case.

In contemporary India the Gandhians, the Nehruites and the Traditionalists continue to contend for political control and for the opportunity to implement their answer to the challenge of Technology. In the mean time the challenge of Technology continues to come in new forms and there are those in the Communist camp and those in the American camp who would like to see all the traditional answers thrown aside and a totally new society established. That kind of revolutionary solution would be unprecedented in India's long history. Therefore, it seems probable that the Indian Religious Tradition will be reasserted again in relation to these social issues even as it was in the past in response to the challenge to its ritual life posed by Islam and the challenge to its philosophy posed by Nineteenth Century Christianity.

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CONCLUSION

This survey of the Indian Religious Tradition reveals both patterns that are unique to India and patterns that can be found in other religious traditions of mankind. Discerning which patterns are unique and which are similar to patterns found elsewhere is a matter for scholarly judgement and can never be accomplished with absolute certainty. From the perspective of the "religious tradition" one would have to disagree with a historian who insists that all events are "unique," and with a phenomenologist who insists that the whole tradition can be reduced to structures found everywhere. The Indian Religious Tradition is in itself unique, but it reveals patterns which serve as suggestive models for arranging the religious phenomena of many different peoples.

The Indian Religious Tradition is unique because the quality of the religious experience it centers itself around is different from religious experiences in other traditions, because the cultural forms through which that experience expresses itself are related to one another and to the central experience in a way that is not found elsewhere, and because of the particular pattern of unity and flexibility the Tradition was able to develop.

The Indian Religious Tradition was committed to a unique kind of religious experience set forth in the message of the Buddha and the teaching of the Upaniṣadic schools. It is not the purpose of the present volume to attempt to describe that unique religious experience,[1] but only to insist that the Tradition understood the acceptance of *duḥkha* and the knowing of *Brahman* in a way which made that experience quite different from Greek *theoria*, Christian *grace*, or Japanese *satori*. A survey of the Indian Religious Tradition is helpful only to the extent that this unique experience is

1. I hope, in a future volume, to attempt such a description.

preserved and illumined in relation to the effect that it had upon the life of the Indian people in a variety of situations down through the ages.

The Indian Tradition is also unique in the synthetic view it took of the various cultural forms, and their relation to one another and to the central religious experience. Because of the close affinity between culture and religious experience the religious life of the Indian Tradition was unusually varied. Complex social norms combined with soaring philosophical grandeur and with a multiplicity of warm and simple ritual acts to make for a religious environment which was diverse, complex and full. The story of the Indian Religious Tradition is the story of this rich varietv and its true character is misrepresented if the variety is swept aside to reveal only an underlying essence.

Finally, the uniqueness of the Indian Religious Tradition is revealed in the strong yet flexible Tradition which ties the underlying and unifying religious experience together with this rich variety of expression. In some measure every tradition has some standard of religious authority comparable to the "Veda" of the Indian Tradition and every tradition allows in some way for the development of that authority. What is unique about the Indian Tradition is the way in which the living stream of *Pandits*, acting as the authorative interpreters of the "Veda", were able to guide the Tradition past a variety of dangers and make it one of the oldest and most complete of all living religious traditions.

A survey of the Indian Religious Tradition reveals, however, not only patterns that appear to be unique to this situation, but also patterns which by their inherent nature suggest that they might be similar to patterns that could be found in other religious traditions. Such similarity might be accounted for in terms of a common source of revelation or a common essence underlying all phenomena, but such explanations involve prior theological or philosophical commitments which are hardly observable in the phenomena

themselves. From the perspective of a Historian of Religious Traditions it is possible to say only that where similar patterns seem to exist in different religious traditions, they can be accounted for by the fact that the religious experience of man gives rise to certain problems in human existence which are dealt with in different religious traditions in somewhat similar ways. If in addition there is an essence underlying all man's religious experience, such a reality can only be known through some other channel and is beyond the scope of the Historian of Religious Traditions.

The strongest pattern that is seen in the Indian Religious Tradition is that which divides the Tradition into the four distinct phases which are reflected in the outline of this study. The "mythic", "prophetic", "dogmatic" and "critical" phases in the development of religious understanding appear to reflect basic stages in the development of human consciousness and as such can be found in most of the major religious traditions. The shift from "mythic" to "prophetic" which was so noticeable in so many cultures in the general period of the Sixth Century B. C. has received the attention it deserves from many philosophers. The other two transition points have been less clearly articulated by Western scholars probably because in the Western Religious Tradition the first more or less corresponds with the beginnings of Christianity, which has been erroneously understood as a "new" tradition, and because the second is still too close for proper perspective. In spite of the difficulties presented in the Western Religious Tradition, these four phases seem quite clearly discernible in both the Indian and Chinese Traditions, and are found in enough other settings to indicate that they are a useful pattern in which to see the development of the religious life of various societies.

A second pattern in the Indian Religious Tradition which might have similarities elsewhere is that religious experience expresses itself in three major cultural forms : art, philosophy and socio-political organization. Without the perspective gained in a survey of this kind one is inclined to say that a certain tradition, or at least a certain

phase of a tradition, is dominated by one or another of these forms of religious expression. It has, for instance, frequently been said that Indian religion was dominated by a quest for knowledge or *gnosis*, but this could hardly be maintained in the light of the total picture. The truth is that these three forms of expression reflect the three characteristics of human life : emotion, thought, and will, and that all three are important channels for expressing religious life. It seems likely that in a mature tradition all three will be represented in a revolving pattern which calls on one or another to meet a particular set of circumstances.

Finally, a survey of the Indian Religious Tradition reveals a pattern of ebb and flow, of aggressiveness and passivity, of withdrawal on one front and advance on another, which makes it hard to predict the future but safe to predict that there will be a future. This study makes it clear that religious traditions are not static entities likely to crumble with the first dramatic change. Nor are they necessarily to be viewed as the weight of the past which limits the freedom of the present. In some measure, at least, the religious traditions are the voices of the future working toward a meaning that is yet to be fulfilled.

The future of the Indian Religious Tradition is as uncertain as that of any other. In some ways it appears as if the fourth phase is ending and the battle for "survival" is coming to a close. No doubt a new phase will involve the breaking down of India's traditional isolation and some combining of different religious traditions to form a richer religious environment for all mankind. The Indian Religious Tradition already dreams of this possibility and talks today of a uniting of traditions that will bring all mankind to an awareness of the all-pervading *Brahman*. When and how such a dream might be fulfilled is not important. What is important is that such dreaming means that the vitality, which down through the ages tied together cultural forms and a religious experience to make the Indian Religious Tradition, is still alive and still insists that the truth of the "Veda" is yet to be fully realized.

GLOSSARY OF SANSKRIT WORDS

advaita—non-duality; name of a major philosophical position set forth by Śaṇkara in the Eighth Century.

anātman—Self; a doctrine of the Buddhists who believe that the individual does not possess a permanent soul.

anitya—impermanence; a doctrine of the Buddhists who hold that the essence of reality is change.

āśramas—the fourfold division of life into the stages of student, householder, recluse and saint.

aśuras—mysterious and sometimes malevolent powers found in Ṛg Vedic religion.

ātman—the permanent Self realized on both the cosmic and individual levels.

avatāras—manifestations of Lord Viṣṇu undertaken to aid mankind.

avidyā—ignorance; that which distorts man's view of Reality.

bhakti—devotion to the deity.

bhāṣya—commentary.

bodhisattva—intermediary being in Buddhism who through compassion leads men to Nirvāna.

Brahman—the Ultimate Reality.

Brāhman—the highest caste made up of priests and *pandits*.

darśana—philosophy; literally, "a view" of Reality.

deva—deity; in Ṛg Veda religion, the "power" addressed in the hymn.

dharma—cosmic, ritual, and moral order.

dhī—vision, including both revelation and wisdom.

duḥkha—the painfulness of life understood as a cycle of rebirths.

garbha gṛha—womb; also inner sanctum of the temple.

jñāna—knowledge.

kaivalyam—salvation conceived of as separation.

karma—action; also the law by which actions receive their due reward in successive forms of existence.

kavi—poet and seer.

lakṣaṇās—distinguishing marks.

līlā—the action of the cosmos conceived as the "sport" of God.

linga—the phallic symbol used especially as a cultic representation of Śiva.

lokasaṃgraha—the temporary ordering of life and society in its present form.

māyā—the deluding power of the phenomena which obscure the Reality beyond.

mokṣa—salvation conceived of as a "release" from rebirth.

Nirvāna—salvation conceived of as the disappearance of the breath of life; particularly Buddhist.

prajña—wisdom.

prāṇa—breath; a symbol of the Self.

prakṛti—nature; distinguished from *puruṣa* (spirit) in Sāṁkhya philosophy.

puruṣa—spirit or self; especially in Sāṃkhya philosophy.

ṛṣi—sage; especially in the *Ṛg Veda* where the *ṛṣi* was a heroic hymn-maker.

ṛta—cosmic order in Ṛg Vedic religion.

śakti—power; personification of deity; often conceived of as feminine.

samsāra—the world conceived of as a sea of change and experienced by the individual as a series of rebirths.

sat-chit-ānanda—salvation experienced as "Being", "Consciousness", and "Bliss".

śila—ritual discipline; particularly of Buddhist monks.

smṛti—that which is "remembered"; that part of the Veda or tradition which comes after the Upanisads and includes the Epics, Purāṇas, Lawbooks, and Commentaries.

śruti—that which is "heard"; that part of the Veda which includes the Saṃhītas, Brahmāṇas, Āranyakas and Upaniṣads.

svadharma—one's own ritual and moral duty.

tat—"That"; the Reality underlying phenomena.

varṇa—caste; literally "colour".

Vedānta—the philosophy based on the teaching of the Upaniṣads.

yajña—cosmic sacrifice.

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